

**Collateral Damage:**  
**Race, Gender, and the Post-Combat Transition**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology in the Graduate School  
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2014

ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

Research on the military has historically focused on the potentially de-stratifying effects of service, including reductions of racial inequality and social mobility. Taking a life course approach, this prior research tends to claim that the military is a positive turning point in the lives of disadvantaged men. Scholars point to the educational benefits of the GI Bill, racial integration, and health care to claim that military service, especially during peacetime, is largely beneficial to service members. While it is certainly the case that the military has provided some historical benefits to marginalized groups, recent research has given us strong reasons to question how beneficial military service is to stigmatized groups. Significant racial and gender inequalities remain, and in some cases, are deepening. Drawing on 50 in-depth interviews with veterans this dissertation examines how the organizational habitus of the military, despite organizational proclamations of meritocracy, may contribute to inequality. Focusing on the unintended consequences of military policies surrounding mental health problems, discrimination, and family relations, I create a synthesis of organizational and critical race theories to show how military policies may compound problems for soldiers and veterans. Focusing on the contradictions between stated organizational policies and actual practice, I show how the organizational arrangements of the military normalize overt expressions of racial and gender based discrimination, creating a sometimes-hostile environment for women and minorities and leaving them little recourse for

recrimination. When policies protecting the stigmatized undermine the power and prerogatives of commanders or conflict with the military's mission, it is not the powerful that suffer. Further, I show how military policies promoting family, such as extra pay for married soldiers, are at odds with the multiple deployments and high mental health incidences of this generation's wars. Although the military relies on women on the "home front," as a basis of support, the exigencies of service undermine relationship stability.

I argue that traditional findings on the de-stratifying effects of service are partially a product of an analytical frame that neglects internal organizational dynamics.

## Dedication

This wouldn't have happened without Louise.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 *This is Not a Movie*

"I actually was in the MEP [Military Entrance Processing] station and I think I finished everything around, like, 8:30 and I walked into the TV room (laughs) and asked them were they watching a movie because *I saw the first plane hit*. And they was, like, "Oh, this is not a movie." And I'm, like, "Well, what's going on?" Everyone was, like, "We're being attacked." So, I ran *out* the MEPS room and I actually ran to the counselors that...tell you where you're going. And they told me that I had just finished raising my right hand, so it was too late for me to actually opt out of anything. 'Cause, you know, once you raise your right hand, you're in the Army... So, I started – I actually cried, you know. But...a recruiter talked to me and told me, "Look, this is what you actually joined for. You didn't join to get paid. You didn't join, you know, to have fun." And, you know, I thought about it. I was, like, "You know what? I have to do what I have to do." So, I actually shipped out about two or three days later, you know, 'cause we couldn't leave right then and there because they had everything on lock-down."

Hillary could barely contain this story when we began our interview: she launched into it before I had time to turn on the recorder or get her to sign the consent form. She joined the military on the early morning of September 11, 2001 *before* the events that would launch the longest war in U.S. history, she was hoping to move beyond her native Brooklyn and the Burger King job that couldn't pay the bills. A black

single mother, she expected to get job training, money for college, and some long-term economic security for her two-year old. After all, this is what "Army Strong" advertisements claim and recruiters promise. These expectations were only half met, and when we sat down to talk, Hillary was getting ready to deploy again. She hadn't been able to find a civilian job with her training as a military mechanic, so she had moved on from Burger King to McDonalds. Again unable to cover her bills, and with only a high school education, she felt the only way to provide for her family was to redeploy, so she signed up with the National Guard. Unlike her last deployment, where she only went on a few patrols (she stopped after a near miss with an IED), this time, she is driving a supply convoy.

Although Hillary's experiences are exceptional given that she enlisted on September 11, 2001 the day that launched two wars the U.S. has yet to fully extricate itself from, in many ways her experiences are similar to this generations returning veterans. Although she hasn't been diagnosed with any mental or physical disorders, Hillary, like several of my respondents, told me that she can't sleep, has outbursts of anger, and difficulty remembering things, and is worried about putting her children at danger when disciplining them. Hillary, like every woman I spoke with also described experiencing gendered discrimination while deployed. As a black woman, she is part of a demographic group greatly overrepresented in the military; a group that is the fastest growing segment of the homeless population (US Government Accountability Office,

2011), denied the promise of a better life that may have motivated her enlistment in the first place.

Hillary's post-service experience belied the promises the military makes to encourage enlistment. Although prior scholarship tends to claim that the military lessons racial and economic inequalities (Moskos and Butler 1996), a recent review questions this scholarly orthodoxy (Burk & Espinoza, 2012), showing that people of color in the military face harsher punishments than whites, lag in promotion rates for equal qualifications, and experience worse mental health and physical health outcomes following traumas. Why has the scholarly orthodoxy of military egalitarianism endured in the face of these systematic inequalities?

I argue that the military's status as a "total institution," (Goffman 1961) allows it to control nearly every aspect of soldiers lives as well as--the equally importantly public narratives surrounding systematic organizational inequality. The military relies on formal structures of inequality (Acker 2006) perhaps more than any other organization. My respondents fear swift and intense retribution if they buck this entrenched hierarchy. Given this, people with stigmatized identities--racial minorities, women, and people with mental health problems-- learn to bury their concerns. This dissertation is a counter narrative--grounded in the reports of soldiers--to scholarship that sees the military as an egalitarian meritocracy. Through an analysis of my respondents' narratives, I argue that the military is a racialized (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Omi 1994b), and gendered (Risman,

2004a) organization with internal mechanisms—which are not subject to external review—allowing it to suppress reports of discrimination.

## **1.2 Background**

The military is perhaps the most understudied organization in the sociological canon. Indeed, scholars as reputable as Giddens (1986) claim that military sociology remains an inadequately developed area of the discipline. Although much sociological theory since at least Weber (1922) has been focused on the bureaucracy and hierarchy, two organizational forms which are arguably epitomized by the military, the body of research that builds upon these concepts is largely built upon studies of the private sector (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). This is despite the fact that the military profoundly shapes nearly every aspect of the lives of service members (Goffman 1961) and their families, often times for generations (MacLean, 2007). Given that the United States has been at war for longer than at any point in its history, a qualitative explanation of how military service influences people's lives is overdue.

The military functions partially through regimentation and centralized command structures, but also strives to foster camaraderie strong enough to inspire self-sacrifice for the good of the larger social unit (Durkheim 1912). As Modell and Haggerty (1991) argue, through warfare and militarization, "societies reorder themselves, both in opposition to an outside enemy and internally" (1991, 206), in accordance with purported social needs. However, we know little about how the sociological fissures of

race and gender influence this societal reordering, or how individual raced and gendered soldiers construct their biographies in relation to wartime service. In order to enrich our understanding of these processes, this research focuses on the military during wartime and the post-service outcomes it helps to produce.

Since the post-Vietnam War inception of the "All Volunteer Force" (AVF), the U.S. military has, among other strategies, marketed itself as an avenue for social mobility (goarmy.com 2009). The military claims that it can teach skills transferrable to the civilian labor market and offers post-service educational funding for those who qualify. In line with these claims, sociological research on race and military service tends to highlight the social benefits veterans receive from service. Particularly for women and minorities (and women who are minorities), this line of research generally claims that military structures mitigate the effects of discrimination in the civilian labor force (Moskos and Butler 1996), and that the overrepresentation of people of color in the military (Segal and Segal 2004) is the result of self-selection into an institution that provides a buffer against discrimination. The military claims this buffer helps to provide opportunities for advancement absent in the general labor market, and bills itself as an "equal opportunity" employer (Lutz 2007).

While prior research indicates that the military may function as an avenue for social mobility in the lives of women and people of color, we have not examined in sufficient detail how the possibly de-stratifying effects of military service carry over into

civilian life. Recent advances in sociological theories of race and gender offer strong reasons to link these theories to life course perspectives, thereby providing a more complete picture of this important transition.

For instance, the "racialized social systems" (Bonilla-Silva 1996, 2006) framework argues that in societies partially structured by racial inequality, institutions and ideologies arise that reproduce, however unintentionally, the racialized social order. This theory predicts that contemporary social institutions (such as the military and the Veterans Administration), as officially "color-blind" institutions, may produce types of inequality not readily measured by the traditional survey methods used in much life-course research on turning points. According to Bonilla-Silva (1997), race relations are overt or covert depending on the racial structure of a given society. In subsequent work, Bonilla-Silva uses this insight to map the covert racial language of the post-civil rights era (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). I apply this insight to the racial structure of an organization and its accompanying ideology. For instance, liberal organization, such as colleges and universities, will likely comply with social strictures sanctioning overtly racist expression. Conversely, conservative organizations, such as the military, will at least be less likely to sanction such expressions, if they do not openly condone them.

Similarly, "intersectional" (Collins 2000) approaches see race, gender and class as mutually constitutive elements influencing both the construction of self and social stratification. Research in this tradition sees single-variable approaches as insufficient for

explaining the multiple pathways producing unequal outcomes. Race, gender, and class are tied up in a "matrix of domination" (Collins 2000) that must be analyzed as "simultaneous and linked" (Choo 2010 132}. That is, in a given social context, a set of identities may be differentially privileged or disadvantaged, and it is the job of the analyst to empirically parse what factors are dominant. These theories enrich life course perspectives on post-service transitions by accounting for racialized and gendered meanings. In addition, life course research benefit from a more explicit connection to the ways discrimination can shape individuals' trajectories.

Both of these traditions fall broadly under the rubric of "critical" theories (Burton, et al. 2010), that see racial and gender oppression as constitutive of nearly every aspect of the social world (Acker, 2006; Feagin, 2000; Omi 1994b). Because race and gender relations are primary modes of social organization, programs and policies aimed a lessening racial and gender inequality may change the form of inequality in a given domain, but it doesn't necessarily follow that efforts in a single organization can have widespread societal reverberations. According to Reskin (2012), much research on racial discrimination analyzes incidents of inequality as if they are invariant across social domains. Crucially, this approach ignores that there are "reciprocal feedback relations between racial disparities across domains" (18). The same is true for gender, as inequality in one organization can put one at a disadvantage when entering a new organization. For the military, this means that despite attempts to create an environment

of racial and gender inequality, widely accepted stereotypes and behaviors cannot be eradicated. I show how these conditions play out in daily life.

This dissertation also integrates empirical findings on the military with organizational theory that sees categorical inequality produced and strengthened through organizational interaction (Acker, 2006; Tomaskovic-Devey, Zimmer, & Harding, 2009). Although prior work on the military has drawn little from this research, the extreme gender and racial segregation of labor in the military, coupled with the entrenched power hierarchies of rank make it an excellent research site for uncovering how opportunity hoarding, boundary maintenance, (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Wray, 2006), and other forms of social closure structure relationships within the military and across the subsequent life. Organizations such as the military are raced and gendered, but importantly the particular institutional arrangements of the organization need to be illustrated to show how they influence race and gender relations.

Although life course research on the effects of military service generally draws a distinction between peacetime and war (MacLean and Elder 2007), many prior studies that find service reduces inequality were conducted during peacetime (i.e., Moskos and Butler 1996, Lundquist 2008). Therefore, these studies do not account for possible racialized and gendered variations in the stresses of war. Further, there is some indication that post-conflict outcomes vary by race and gender (Kulka et al. 1990, Tanielian and Jaycox 2008), but we know little about why these variations exist. Studies



of the stress process show that blacks have higher levels of depression and implicate racial discrimination as the likely cause (Turner and Avison 2003). Black soldiers may face greater levels of stress upon reintegration, as historically, some black soldiers have resented their treatment upon returning from war (Parker 2009). The racialization framework provides one avenue for examining these variations, as it focuses on how facially race-neutral policies, such as those offered by veterans' centers, may inadvertently produce racial stratification.

Further, studies focusing on satisfaction during service tell us little about whether benefits accrued during service translate to civilian advantages upon discharge for minorities and women. This is especially important for several reasons. First, a large body of sociological literature on racialized and gendered mental health effects leads us to believe that these social statuses influence mental health outcomes (Brown 2003). Second, labor market discrimination against women (Correll et al. 2007) and black men (Pager 2003) is well established in the literature. What we do not yet know is whether skills acquired through military training provide a strategic intervention, providing greater post- service opportunities for women and minority veterans. Third, the current wars have created a historically unprecedented condition for women soldiers, as they have been exposed to combat in large numbers due to the changing nature of warfare. Intersectional approaches to the experiences of women's reintegration patterns will provide a valuable addition to our knowledge, as an intersectional focus on the "politics

of location" in social systems allows us to see how social institutions and social interactions mutually constitute systems of inequality (Burton et al. 2010).

Qualitative interviews and ethnographic methods have been central in the development of intersectional and racialized social system approaches to the study of inequality (Burton et al. 2010). This study continues in this tradition, focusing on the particular issues faced by people of color and women in the process of reintegrating from our current wars. In order to gain a holistic empirical understanding of the complex factors that influence inequality in the military, this study proceeds by asking the following questions central to the discipline of sociology: (1) How do nominally egalitarian institutions and organizations such as the military reproduce inequality? (2) What specific mechanisms account for the variations in outcomes for stigmatized identities, (such as race, gender, and mental health status), and are these variations general stratification processes or domain specific? (3) Is organizational "decoupling" (Meyer & Rowan 1977a) tied to stigmatized identities? That is, are particular organizational programs more likely to deviate from written protocols based on the racial, gender, or mental health status of those accessing resources? And if so, can we as sociologist interested in inequality attempt to pinpoint why?

For the military, as Modell and Haggerty (1991, 213) point out for Vietnam veterans, "the actual process of reincorporation into civilian society after Vietnam, so plausibly a key element in the structuring of the life course of those who fought, has

resisted the relatively generalized analytic tools that sociology tends to utilize.

Reincorporation has not yet found its ethnographer." Nearly two decades later, the body of sociological knowledge on veterans still lacks a sound qualitative analysis of the transition from military service during wartime. Although substantial research exists on the effect of military service over the life course, very little has been done to look at the specifics of reintegration patterns from the perspective of veterans themselves. Although not properly ethnographic, this dissertation begins to fill this gap, providing a qualitative account of the transition to civilian life and the lasting effects of wartime service. Further, there is very little written about specific racialized patterns of reintegration and almost nothing written about the effects of combat on women's post-service outcomes, beyond a narrow focus on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Military Sexual Trauma (MST). For women, we know little about service and the labor market or family reintegration process. This is despite the fact that many women join the armed forces with the same substantive social mobility goals as their male counterparts (Carr and Kefalas 2009). By connecting military service to theoretical advances in the study of discrimination, this research will fill this substantial gap in the literature, providing a qualitative account of the organizational arrangement that influence the post-service reintegration process. This research begins with the military but has implications for organizations generally. Beyond the military this dissertation extends organizational theory by showing a concrete mechanism through which inequality is

reproduced. Scholars of inequality have increasingly called for mechanism based accounts of stratification (Gross, 2009). Seeing mechanisms as fulcrums on which social inequality swings, I argue that institutional forums for addressing stratification can instead be used to entrench inequality. People seeking organizational redress are “defensively othered” (Schwalbe et al. 2000) drawing a line between themselves and organizational orthodoxy. Further, this dissertation strengthens our understanding of race and gender inequality in an allegedly post-racial and post-gendered era, as the normative environment of the military is decidedly color and gender conscious.

### ***1.3 Subject Selection***

Because interview with hard to reach populations are difficult to arrange, I relied on personal contacts, job fairs, non-profit veteran centers, and snowball sampling to generate respondents for this work. Despite this, I still had substantial issues getting veterans who were willing to talk about their experiences. To overcome this, I did interviews in three states (North Carolina, California, and Louisiana), and used personal and professional contacts to generate respondents. All of these states have large military populations and several huge military bases. In fact, as much as tradition qualitative research is geographically bound, the military as an organization largely breaks down geographical barriers by giving members little to no control over where they will be stationed (although they try, if possible, to place married couples who are both enlisted in the same U.S. region). As much quantitative data shows (Hoge et al., 2004; Marx et al.,

2008; Suris, 2004; Tanielian, 2008), the concerns of veteran's relating to multiple deployments, family matters, and racial and gender discrimination are largely similar across these geographic sites. Indeed, nationally representative surveys report similar problems among veterans (increased substance abuse, marital issues) with small regional differences (Sayer et al. 2009). Traumas are not geographically bound. In fact, many of my respondents had been stationed at or near the other bases where I carried out these interviews.

I chose these locations because of their large military populations and for ease of contact. California has the highest population of both active duty and reserve military. Historically, California has in some cases benefitted economically from the military industrial complex, as the placement of bases provides an injection of Keynesian stimulus (Lutz 2001). Because of this history, California has a strong infrastructure—relative to some other states—for dealing with the issues surrounding militarism.

The interviews I conducted in California were done in 29 Palms, California, host of the world's largest Marine base. Located in the Mojave Desert, this base is a primary training ground for Iraq and Afghanistan missions, because of its rugged desolate terrain and climatic similarities (i.e. mountainous and dry climate, large daily temperature swings). Beyond the base, the town of 29 Palms, like many towns that surround military installations, is dominated by the culture of the military (Lutz 2007). Strip-clubs, "massage parlors," bars, barbershops and fast food restaurants dominate the

landscape. Largely populated by Marines (although there are other branches present in support roles, such as Navy units who serve as medics and psych-techs) many of the interviews from these respondents near this base were the most graphic regarding combat experiences. Marines are, according to one respondent, a “pacifying force” or the “tip of the spear” and often see the heaviest combat.

Similar to the national patterns, California’s social services have been inundated with returning veterans and have had trouble keeping up the demand for services (Glantz 2009). There are reported delays in receiving benefits, high unemployment rates, rising levels of homelessness, especially among black women, with California containing a full quarter of the nation’s homeless veterans (Glantz 2009, G & Office 2013). A family member, then a recently returned Afghanistan veteran who lived in the area, facilitated entry into this community of veterans. I began interviews with his contacts, and proceeded to ask subsequent interviewees for the names of possible subjects.

North Carolina has the seventh largest population of veterans and reserve members in the nation (America’s Promise Alliance 2014). In North Carolina, more than 15% of the working age population is active-duty military, and veterans constitute 13% of the total population. In Durham County, there are 18,155 veterans (according to the 2000 census). Home to eight military bases, including Fayetteville’s Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune, the military exerts a powerful influence over the culture and politics of local and state politics (Lutz 2001, Baca 2010) and by extension, national politics. I made

three trips to the Fort Bragg area to interview veterans who were recently returned. I also interviewed a number of former service members in Durham and surrounding counties. Similar to the situation in California, the veterans in North Carolina are, according to research, beset by a number of mental health and social problems at higher rates than the general population (Goldberg, 2008). Further, the several of the states four Veteran's Affairs health Centers have been inundated with new cases, resulting in delayed care, long drives to centers with openings, or even seeking help elsewhere. It is unclear from existing research how these issues may be compounded by mental health status or race and gender stratification.

I also conducted interviews in Hammond, Louisiana. Although this state has a smaller military population than California or North Carolina, it is still above the national average. There were no major demographic differences among the veterans from these three areas.

Given that in military towns there is often more support for the military and veteran's than in other locals, my findings may actually be under reporting the problems that active duty service members and veterans face, as the services present in these areas may mitigate against some of the issues that veterans face elsewhere.

#### ***1.4 Data and Methods***

I draw on 50 in depth semi-structured interviews with recently returned veterans: 36 men (16 black, 19 white, 1 Latino) and 14 (2 Latino 4 black, 8 white) women.

As stated in the previous section, interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling; I also recruited from visits to community centers, veteran job fairs, and local veteran's groups. Much of the research on veterans says that they are reluctant to talk about their experience, and this did make finding respondents sometimes difficult (Holyfield 2011, Caplan 2011, Shiraldi 1999). One respondent told me he was initially afraid I was going to ask him if he killed anyone, and several lamented that civilians were only interested in what they called the "entertainment value" of war. Even so, some respondents were initially reluctant to talk with me. Several of my respondents didn't want to share the names of other veterans, a response found in the literature and usually attributed to the protective feeling that veterans have towards one another (Finley 2011). This makes snowball sampling more difficult, as a fundamental assumption of the method is that hard to reach populations will be willing to share contacts once you establish rapport. However, after the interviews, I was impressed with how open some respondents were—describing sexual assault, miscarriages, divorces, discrimination, and the difficulties of mental illness. A number of them wrote to me thanking me, and telling me I was the first person whom they had discussed their experiences with. Further, a number of my respondents told me they told me more than they intended to, and that they were surprised at their openness.

These interviews cover many aspects of the process of reintegration, including looking for work, re-acclimating to family life, discrimination in and out of the military



and mental and physical health following service. Interviews have ranged from one to nearly four hours. Interviewees were offered \$25 in compensation but many of them opted to donate the money to charity, claiming the opportunity to help another veteran was motivation enough. My respondents range in age from 24-43 and spent between 4 to nearly 25 years in the military. They served at least one combat tour to be included in the sample and some served as many as five tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. (The number of combat tours is separate from the number of deployments, as many soldiers are sent to international bases not directly involved in the combat mission, such as Germany, again separating them from family). This is important because there is a relationship between number of combat tours and a host of subsequent outcomes(Hoge et al., 2004; Seal, Bertenthal, Miner, Sen, & Marmar, 2007). Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations: college campuses, homes, coffee shops, public libraries (the latter being the best place, as they often have quiet study rooms open to the public) and even in my home. These interviews taught me a lot about the process and in many important ways they taught me what not to do.

Although classic and contemporary ethnographies are littered with accounts of the hapless field researcher stumbling into knowledge (Venkatesh 2008), more rarely do researchers discuss personal safety during interviews. In her analysis of social networks among black and white high school students Royster (Royster, 2003), discusses safety precautions she took when interviewing men. When I first read about her precautions, I

was slightly offended that she didn't trust her informants. When I entered the field, I was quickly disabused of this naiveté. On my third interview, when I arrived at the house of a respondent, I quickly realized that this was an unsafe situation, and that a veteran with PTSD may become violent if they felt a question is threatening. Indeed, in Finley's (2011) study of veterans with PTSD her interviews were conducted in a VA center. Even given the security of such a location, she was told to stay near the door as she was conducting interviews, in case her questions provoked an attack. After that interview, I made sure that all my interviews were conducted in public. However, there was also perhaps some danger in this situation, as one interviewee, Marcus, whom I met in a coffee shop, had trouble controlling his affect during the interview. He showed up late, in ill-fitting boot, with a camouflage backpack. When an interviewee arrived wearing military clothing, I took it as an example of their identity still being tied to their service. Early on in the interview, Marcus discussed his PTSD and said, "some wounds aren't visible." He was angry and volatile, raising his voice. At one point in the interview, he opened his shirt to show me one of the patches he had earned for valor in combat, revealing a bullet-proof vest. I was shocked. His body armor was a great demonstration of how much fear PTSD can instill in its victims.

I moved on with the interview and didn't ask about the body armor—but Marcus later brought it up himself. He told me that he wears the body armor because he is afraid of gun-free zones. Marcus also said that on days like this one, when he knew he

was irritable and might have an episode (i.e., explode in anger), he left his guns at home. When the interview ended, Marcus asked me for a ride. I agreed, and again immediately realized that I had once again put myself in danger. Fortunately, I delivered him to his apartment without incident, but I reminded myself not to give rides in the future.

As Schwalbe and Wolkomir point out (2001), all interview situations involve some "threat" in that the respondent is in an unequal power relationship with the interviewee. Dominant notions of masculinity heighten this threat for men who signify their status in society through practices of mastery and control that are central to cultural understandings of gender. Because of this, "questions calling for answers that put control, autonomy, or rationality into doubt, if only implicitly, may be experienced as threatening" (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001). Every section of my research instrument contained such questions, as I was interested in understanding how the structural arrangements of the military affected the lives of individuals. These structures necessarily impinge upon individuals' levels of control and mastery, as obedience to orders is of central military importance. Because of this, many of the findings I report regarding mastery among my male respondents may in fact be conservative, as masculinity, if Schwalbe and Wolkomir are to be believed, should lead men to exaggerate their "accounts" (Scott & Lyman 1968) of their mastery over the social environment.

I found interviewing women to be much easier and felt these respondents took less time to open up about their experiences. This was unexpected, given that much of the research indicates that race and gender matching (May 2014, 1996) greatly helps in getting respondents to open up about their experiences. I felt that on the whole, I established rapport more easily with women and they were less guarded with their answers. Like the men in Schwalbe's example, this is consistent with culturally accepted notions of women and self-expression, and may reflect power dynamics in the interview. Indeed, one female respondent immediately answered my opening question, "can you tell me a little about your military service?" by recounting, in detail, being raped. Underage, plied with alcohol and assaulted by a commanding officer, this respondent never reported the assault and still fought with self-blame. This quick revelation caught me off guard, but it was clearly a traumatic organizing form of the woman's nearly twenty-year career in the military. While I believe it may be the case that shared gender facilitates more openness in interviews, research also indicates that "trigger topic disclosure" (Burton, et al. 2008) among ethnographic respondents often occurs regardless of gender, if researchers (perhaps inadvertently) touch on experiences that respondents believe are related to the trauma.

All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. Coding is based upon Blumer's notion of "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer 1954), using the theoretical traditions of the "racialized social system" (Bonilla-Silva 1997) and "intersectionality"

(Choo & Ferree 2010), to guide analysis. From Bonilla-Silva's framework, I took the notion that much traditional sociological research examines race myopically, with unchanging measures inappropriate to new historical conditions. In response to this historically anachronistic method of understanding race relations, Bonilla-Silva argues that analysts must explicate racism in context. He claims, "the form of race relations, over or covert—depends on the pattern of radicalization that structures a particular society" (Bonilla-Silva 1997). I extend this insight, arguing that prior studies of the military analyze racial phenomena with tools inappropriate to the military environment. For instance, studies of the military often see hierarchies as legitimate (whereas they are questioned in other organizations) or downplay the effects of interpersonal racial hostility.

From the "intersectionality" framework, I examine inequality among multiple stigmatized identities (race, gender, and class) to show how systems of inequality are mutually constitutive (Crenshaw 1991). To paraphrase Stuart Hall (1986), rank is the modality in which race and gender are lived in the military. Mental health concerns, reports of discrimination, and every other area of daily life are governed by a set of social relations refracted through radicalized and gendered concerns.

Analytically, following a recent advance by Mario Small (2009) on the logic of qualitative methods, the interview process allowed for theoretical "saturation" akin to that reached in experimental methods, through which repeated testing gives one greater

confidence in a theoretical assertion (see also Glazer and Strauss 1967; Tavory & Timmermans 2009). Small (2009) claims that qualitative interviewing should be seen as an iterative process during which the interviewer is revising questions and theories in light of respondents' answers. This allows researchers to reach a point of diminishing return, where additional interviews are not providing any new or relevant theoretical insights. At this point, the researcher has come to understand not only the individual cases, but also how respondents think of their shared social worlds. Importantly, however, this does not mean that all respondents agree or that the narrative data is invariant. We should expect conflict between accounts, especially when discussing socially volatile issues such as race or gender. Indeed, much of the comparative qualitative research (Lamont 2000) on social understandings of race shows that whites and blacks consistently diverge on important understandings. Similarly, survey research on racial attitudes shows disagreement across a whole host of areas, including segregation levels (Massey and Denton 1993), responses to the criminal justice system (Alexander 2010), and many other areas of racial conflict, including social spending (Gilens 1999). Gender attitudes also show that men and women disagree on many social issues including U.S. war spending (Brooks and Valentino 2011), attitudes about gender equality, and reproductive health. My respondents tend to conform to these large social cleavages, although they differ in some important ways. However, as a number of scholars have argued, this divergent interpretation of social life is an excellent place for

theory construction and elaboration. The search for theories that reflect the empirical realities of respondents starts by showing how accounts that diverge from taken-for-granted understandings of the social world can be incorporated into a better synthetic understanding. According to Burawoy, "Objectivity is not measured by procedures that assure an accurate mapping of the world but by the growth of knowledge; that is, the imaginative and parsimonious reconstruction of theory to accommodate anomalies" (2002, 5). In my research, I show how anomalies surrounding race and gender talk allow us to build upon extant theory by showing how contextual variability influences the expression of discrimination.

Finally, semi-structured interviews also allow researchers to explore emergent themes and unanticipated findings (LaRossa 2005; Charmaz 2006). Extant research has omitted multiple aspects of service that veterans themselves indicated are important. For instance, early in my interviews a veteran claimed he was afraid of reporting his mental health issues for fear of repercussions. In light of this insight, I began asking respondents if they experienced a similar feeling regarding mental health or racial and gender discrimination. Similarly, my respondents discussed the casual use of racial slurs among whites, a pattern of interpersonal communication unlikely to be picked up during a survey. Capturing these unsolicited insights from respondents is a key strength of qualitative methods and provides an excellent way to extend current theoretical understandings of stratification processes. These unsolicited insights inspired me to

substantially alter the assumptions with which I entered the field and my subsequent analysis. Although I remain interested in the long-term consequences of combat for returning veterans, former soldiers' focus on how the military environment shapes racial and gender interaction made it clear that an analysis of these patterns could potentially be an intellectual contribution with implications for organizations beyond the military. Throughout this dissertation, when I use a quote, I am using an "exemplar case" illustrating my respondents' typical understandings.

### **1.5 Subjectivity Statement**

It has become customary to mention personal subjectivity in qualitative research as a way to highlight power relations in fieldwork. Especially in anthropological works, these statements tend to become a list of relative identities. In journals such as *Gender and Society*, qualitative researchers are often required to offer one of these statements. Although I agree with the spirit of these statements, (i.e., the recognition that knowledge is produced and filtered through personal identities), I feel that they often make too easy a connection between assumed race and the truth-value of respondents' reports. Worse, I feel reflexivity statements often stand in for analysis. As a mixed-race person who is often presumed to be white, I recognize that whites and blacks, in what they assume to be monoracial company, speak differently about race relations than they do in mixed company.



As you will see in my findings, I got different answers from the white respondents and people of color. I think this may be because the white veterans assumed I was white, perhaps leading them to speak freely about race. If anyone asked about my race, I told him or her that I am bi-racial. None of the white respondents asked, however. Following the work of Royster (Royster 2003), with black respondents, I often "signified" my race without mentioning it explicitly. For instance, when one of my respondents mentioned he was an Alpha (a member of the first and most prestigious black fraternity) I told him my grandfather is also an Alpha and that I have attended their meetings. When discussing race relations with a black woman who was in an inter-racial relationship, I discussed openly some of the difficulties of such situations. One black woman said, once the recorder was off, "I knew you were 'something' [meaning non-white]" judging from the questions I asked and, allegedly, my accent. While I can't be certain what effect respondents' assumptions about my race had on my findings, as you will see, many respondents, regardless of race or gender, were quite frank. Consistent with sociological theory on "studying up," the people most likely to be reticent to answer my questions were officers, wary of what I was going to say about the military.

Although I think feminist standpoint theory (Collins 1986) is correct that personal identity influences how we know and understand the world and our interactions (see also Du Bois 1903), too often, subjectivity statements assume a smooth

transition between racial and gender identity and rapport between researcher and fieldworker.

I know that my identity as a black/white bi-racial person who is often socially perceived as white influenced my interviews. In her classic article on "Whiteness as Property," Harris (1995) claims that the symbolic violence inflicted on her grandmother by "passing" to gain knowledge and resources from the white community took a profound toll. This passing put her in daily contact with overtly racist whites who, unaware of the black woman in their midst, were candid about their racism. Perfectly aware that the racialized social structure made passing "a logical [economic] choice," in her later life Harris' grandmother was still enraged to live in a society that "made her complicit in her own oppression" (227) and furthered the logic of white supremacy. While I stayed quiet during the interviews in which whites jokingly referred to people of color as "niggers," taking evident joy in the word, I seethed inside. I knew, from personal experience, that if they knew I had "one drop," their tone and demeanor would have changed. I doubt they would have given me the information at all. Indeed, research indicates that many whites—regardless of political leanings—are comfortable expressing racial animus in the "backstage" (Myers 2005; Hughey 2011), when they are away from people of color. Not revealing my racial identity to whites allowed me access to a space that whites in the post civil-rights era usually keep hidden.

However, although I suspect that knowledge of my racial background would have altered what my respondents were willing to tell me, the key fact is that I don't know how assumptions about my race influenced what people were willing to say (May 2014). I can assume, as does much of the literature, that shared racial background eases rapport building. However, the literature on race matching assumes, contra nearly 60 years of theorizing on the social construction of race (Baker 1998; Omi and Winant 1994), that there is a direct correspondence between perceived race and racial identity. For instance, when discussing his racial identity, one of my respondents told me he was bi-racial. When I shared that I was too, he seemed incredulous and asked, "are you an albino?" In this instance, being open about my racial identity didn't actually encourage candor. Rather, it put me on display as an aberrant case.

Although scholars have long pointed out that identity influences perception and interpretation (Zuberi 2001), quantitative researchers have been resistant to adopting statements of positionality. If the claims of standpoint theorists hold water, quantitative researchers are just as likely to filter the interpretation of their results through personal identity. The implications of this for the study of inequality in organizations is particularly important, given that quantitative research is unquestionably the dominant paradigm. The lack of reflexivity when it comes to quantitative studies is particularly problematic when, for instance, it is used to explain concepts such as racial differences in an outcome while ignoring the underlying racial stratification that contributes to said

outcome (Zuberi 2001). This allows an authoritative “voice from nowhere” (Haraway 1991) to support victim-blaming while claiming the mantle of scientific objectivity (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

Beyond questions surrounding racial identity, much of what I read before entering the field prepared me to meet a lot of resistance in asking questions of veterans. The literature consistently claims that veterans are unlikely to open up about their experiences to non-veterans, if they are willing to talk with you at all (Caplan 2011). As I had never served in the military, many of my respondents did in fact tell me, "you can't understand unless you've been there." Which is, in an absolute existential sense, true. However, I was able to get many to share their experiences of living in a war zone and seeing their friends die. And, as interviews progressed and respondents saw that I understood many of the acronyms soldiers constantly use (F.O.B., M.E.P.S., etc.), knew about major events in the wars, and was frankly willing to admit what I didn't know and give them the deserved position of expertise, they were happy to explain—within limits. Masculinity was also a hurdle in my interviews, as I have mentioned. However, despite what the sociological research would most likely predict, I felt it was the men who had the hardest time conveying their ambivalent feelings on combat, discrimination, and mental illness. Men and women both cried at times during my interviews. However, as a man raised in the U.S., I was personally extremely uncomfortable when interviewing a crying man. This breaks a cultural code of masculinity that I had not encountered in any

methods class before I went into the field. I became acclimated to these emotional displays, however, and learned to both expect them and how to manage them by gently changing the subject so as to not antagonize my respondents. My substantive interests were not focused on the experiences of combat that elicited this reaction—the killing of enemies, or enemies killing friends—but rather how the normative arrangements of the military influenced interactions among soldiers and the long-term consequences of wartime service. Therefore, changing the subject allowed my respondents to save face without my research interests being compromised.

## ***1.6 Outline of the Dissertation***

In Chapter Two, I offer a broad literature review of sociological studies of the military. I begin by showing how the classic theorists used the military to illustrate their central concepts, highlighting what may still provide fruitful insights today. I then discuss how the classic theorists viewed the military and discuss more recent developments regarding life course perspectives, race and gender, and mental health. I then outline how my theoretical framework builds on these literatures, arguing that the traditional focus of research downplays organizational inequality.

In Chapter Three, "Friendly Fire," I examine how the military deals with mental health complaints. Building on classic works in organizational sociology (Meyer & Rowan 1977), I argue that the response to these complaints becomes "decoupled" from formal institutional programs offering treatment. For the military, having deployable

soldiers fit for combat—"force readiness" in military jargon—is a paramount internal goal. However, force readiness may be at odds with publicly popular "front stage" policies mitigating the psychological impact of combat. When mental health issues conflict with force readiness, programs designed to identify people needing help may instead serve as a sorting mechanism, removing those seen as damaged. By oversight or design, the organizational structure undermines programmatic efficacy, worsening the plight of mentally ill soldiers.

In Chapter Four, "Collateral Damage," I explore the contradiction between formally color-blind and gender-blind military policies and the reality of discriminatory "race talk" among soldiers. I show how specific organizational settings vary regarding norms of colorblindness and gender equity and argue for "middle range" (Merton 1949) race and gender theories that are contextually specific. This is important because too often scholars of race and gender discuss discrimination as if it is a monolith. Such an approach ignores a fundamental insight of sociology—context matters. Further, it enforces the notion that discrimination is the result of "bad apples" rather than the outcome of a particular set of institutional and cultural outcomes. That is, discrimination is a "dual structure" (Sewell 1992) containing both cultural and institutional mechanisms, and as such, agents are more likely to make racial and gendered appeals in certain contexts. I find that the masculine culture of the military, coupled with normalized harassment, undermines meritocratic claims.

Chapter Five, "The Army Didn't Issue You a Wife," continues with the theme of opposing formal organizational policies to individuals' lived experiences by assessing how the military's policies promoting family life are supported or undermined with the stresses of deployment. I explore how deployment and return stress families, leading in many cases to separation or divorce. I argue that there is a central contradiction between military and family life, two "greedy institutions" (Segal 1986), and policies aimed to alleviate this tension often fail in practice.

Chapter Six, "Aftermath," synthesizes these findings to provide an overview of the concerns of this generation of veterans. I conclude by claiming the purpose of the military—war fighting—is fundamentally at odds with more humanitarian goals of racial and gender equality. Similarly, the military is tasked with treating the very disorders it creates through repeated exposure to combat. These contradictions, I argue, cannot be addressed through military reforms, unless the military were to reform itself out of existence.

## 2. Classic Theorists on the Military

At least as far back as Durkheim, theorists have drawn on the example of the military to illuminate general theoretical postulates. In his classic text *Suicide*, Durkheim argues that the military powerfully integrates soldiers, instilling such group devotion that self-sacrifice—altruistic suicide—is a predictable outcome (Wray, Colen, & Pescosolido, 2011). Trained to disregard individuality in favor of the larger social group, soldiers devalue their personal lives: according to Durkheim, "the soldier kills himself at the least disappointment" (1897, 238). Durkheim saw this as a crude morality, a throwback to the "primitive" social integration of tribal societies. Central to this understanding was a focus on how an individual's place in a larger social structure enabled or confined possible social actions.

Weber also used the military as a theoretical construct, this time to describe the prototypical bureaucracy (Shields 2003). According to Weber (1968), a key factor in a bureaucracy is the interchangeability of hierarchal positions. Legitimate authority resides in a *position* that can be held by any number of qualified persons based on formal meritocratic criteria; workers and bosses can be replaced as easily as cogs or printer



cartridges. The military epitomized this rationalization, as rank and specialization embody the notion of an abstract, depersonalized worker able to fill any role, while the organization itself is ostensibly neutral.

## ***2.1 Contemporary Theorists on the Military***

Although some contemporary scholars of the military still gesture towards these classics (Holyfield 2011), others largely eschew the theoretical focus of classical theorists in favor of largely descriptive empirical analyses (Rossi, 2012; Seal et al., 2007) focusing on health, employment, or reintegration. Throughout the twentieth century, scholars have examined the structure and function of the military, arguing that its organizational structures have become more similar to those in civilian society (Janowitz 1964) as management became increasingly dependent upon technical expertise. Further, organizations in general have striven to rationalize as much as possible to make “processes more routine and predictable” (D. R. Segal & Segal 1983), thereby minimizing costly human errors.

However, scholars of race and gender have rightly criticized mainstream organizational theorists for ignoring the assumed white male subject at the center of

most organizations in the U.S. (Acker 1990). These scholars argue that omitting study of race and gender in organizational practice can entrench practices that systematically disadvantage women and people of color (Acker, 2006; Roscigno & Wilson, 2013).

Laying the theoretical groundwork for the empirical analysis in this chapter, I draw on the insights of organizational theorists (Light, Roscigno, & Kalev, 2011; Roscigno, 2011) who argue that seemingly neutral bureaucratic processes are imbued with racial and gendered processes (Acker, 2006). I begin by briefly reviewing the extant research on race, gender, and mental health in the military in the context of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. I then show how our understanding of these empirical patterns can be strengthened by insights from critical race (Brown 2003; Burton et al., 2010; Crenshaw 1991) and feminist (Best 2003, Acker 2006) theory. Analysts in this tradition see race and gender as social structures (Lewis, 2004; Sewell 1992) that are not reducible to individual identities. As such, *social roles themselves carry assumptions about the proper race or gender to hold that role*. I argue that shared meanings about proper roles in the military surrounding masculinity and race are embedded in organizational practices.

## ***2.2 The Military and Post-Service Mental Health***

Sociological evidence has long shown that combat exposure has a major effect on the lives of those who experience it, with those exposed to combat having higher rates of long-term unemployment (MacLean, 2010b) and decreased psychological functioning (Elder and Clipp 1989). From the World War I-era "shell shock" to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) prevalent among Iraq and Afghanistan vets exposed to multiple traumas, psychologists have long been aware that combat exposure has the potential to create profound and lasting socio-psychological dysfunction (Jones et al. 2007). Further, although it is a hotly debated finding, research also indicates that combat exposure has effects that are exacerbated by racial stratification, influencing long-term psychological outcomes (Kulka et al. 1990, Beals et al. 2002), and that Black and Hispanic vets specifically have higher long-term post-combat rates of PTSD (Modell and Haggerty 1991). However, it is not clear if these rates are attributable to pre-existing disorders or differential probabilities of being exposed to combat stressors (Frueh et al. 1998), as prior research on veterans has shown that both institutional distrust and differential diagnosis may contribute to divergent health outcomes between blacks and whites.

Veterans Affairs Medical Centers often serve as the primary health care provider for vets who cannot afford care elsewhere, and black veterans are more likely to rely on VA services (Hynes et al. 2007) than their white counterparts. Soldiers using the VA may also have problems exacerbated by socioeconomic status, which has been identified as a possible "fundamental cause" (Link and Phelan 1995) of unequal health outcomes. Link and Phelan (1995) contend that race and gender may similarly work as fundamental causes of health inequalities within a stratified society. Further, mirroring the famous Whitehall studies of the health British Civil Servants that found a strong relationship between mortality and being at the bottom of a hierarchy (Marmont et al. 1991), there is a historical and current health gradient in the military, with those of lower rank having poorer health (MacLean & Edwards, 2010). This is perhaps related to the fact that those with worse educational backgrounds are more likely to be exposed to combat (MacLean, 2011) and have fewer cognitive and financial resources to cope with the fallout. Given the largely working class, all-volunteer military, whose demographics are skewed less white and with lower socioeconomic status than the general population (Segal and Segal 2004), and given projections of over 100,000 cases of PTSD at the close of the wars, we

know little about how organizational arrangements surrounding the intersections of race, class, and gender shape mental health outcomes. For example, past research using a sample of Gulf War vets found that vets using VA medical care had worse PTSD symptoms and lower functioning than comparable active duty servicemen (Richardson et al. 2002). The authors of this study argue that selection may account for this finding, in that those who leave the military may be more prone to mental disorders. While selection may play a factor in who uses VA services, it is also important to discover the ways in which the organizational arrangements of the military structure reintegration. Although literally hundreds of programs have been developed within the military and VA to help soldiers deal with mental health issues, the Department of Defense has very little understanding of the effectiveness of these programs (Theme, n.d.).

On the national level, the VA has already begun to see large increases in veterans seeking treatment for PTSD, TBI, and other psychological disorders associated with combat. Nearly 20% of returning vets now suffer from PTSD and/or depression. Researchers have begun mapping the contours of the historically particular situation of returning vets, noting that asymmetrical combat and non-defined combat roles may be

contributing to growing rates of psychological disorders. There is a historical continuity here, as veterans from prior wars have been accused of malingering for reporting psychological problems related to service and combat exposure (Hymas et al. 1996). Of course, this masculine culture may also affect women's post-service trajectories, and some evidence indicates that a gendered lack of camaraderie negatively impacts female service members (Sayer et al. 2009). The sheer scale of this national problem is astounding, as PTSD and TBI are considered the “signature injuries” of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

While these empirical patterns are striking and reflect the inequality inherent in the military hierarchy, race, gender, and class relations remain undertheorized in the literature. Outcomes are often not reported within gender by race for mental health disorders or assaults (*Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies*, 2013; Tanielian, 2008), and the institutional responses to these issues is often *assumed*, rather than shown, to be race- and gender- neutral. This assumption is at odds with a huge body of literature that shows how racial and gendered concerns shape

both preconditions for diagnoses (Read & Gorman, 2010; Williams & Jackson, 2005) and treatment outcomes for a host of physical and mental health issues (George 2003).

### **2.2.1 *A Note on Race***

This dissertation follows the convention in social science that sees race as a social construction (Bonilla-Silva 1999; Omi 2001; Montagu 1962). Constructionists see race not as natural or biological categories, but rather, as political divisions imposed through power and ideology. Race is the assumption "that individuals can be divided into groups based on phenotype or genotype and that those groups have meaningful differences" (Burton et al. 2010, 440). The concept of race developed historically to justify conquest and enslavement (Jordan 1974) and is still used to explain a whole host of current inequalities (Hunt 2007). Although this perspective has been written about extensively and has been a standard assumption in the social sciences since Du Bois' (DuBois 1903) writings on the creation of whiteness and Boas' Columbia School of Anthropology (Baker 1998), there are still pervasive misunderstandings on the theoretical and practical implications of social construction in the literature.

In this section, I briefly list the issues surrounding constructionist views of race and show why I rely on constructionist theory. First, a number of scholars argue that if race is a social construction, then research that treats it as "real" reifies a concept that cannot exist without a concomitant racism (Hirschman 2004). Scholars in this tradition generally argue that race as an analytic category should be replaced with the more accurate term "ethnicity" (Harrison 1995, Barth 1964). Second, some claim that there is a conceptual slippage between social science and folk theories of race, claiming that because of this, "*the history of racial domination is inscribed in the scientific unconscious of our disciplines*" (Wacquant 1997, 223, emphasis in original). Given this, scholars must be careful that their analyses avoid naturalizing the dominant relations inherent in the folk conceptualization of race. Third, and importantly for our purposes, much of the research on race and the military treats race as a simple demographic category, downplaying constructionist theories.

Treating race as real in research undoubtedly reifies it (Loveman 1999), undermining the constructionist goal of showing the contingency of race. However, replacing the concept of race with the equally contingent and constructed category of



ethnicity does not solve this problem. Race has social effects beyond ethnicity. For instance, scholars in the "whiteness studies" tradition have definitively shown that white ethnics have been able to assimilate by submerging their ethnic identity under the umbrella of a broader racial one (Roediger 1999, Ignatiev 1995, see also Alba and Nee 2003). Second, segregation patterns and educational attainment, especially for black ethnic migrants to the U.S., tend to follow racialized, rather than ethnic, patterns (i.e., Cubans have residential patterns mirroring white and black American patterns, depending on their racial—not ethnic Cuban—background) (Massey and Denton 1993). Therefore, scholars who downplay the effects of race in their research may fundamentally misrepresent reality.

Treating race as a simple demographic category ignores that race is constructed through policies, practices, and interactions (Denzin, 2001). Indeed, because there is “no obvious and straightforward technique to employ in distinguishing racial groupings” (Eberhardt and Randall 1997, 198) when conducting research on race, measurement techniques that take race as a self-evident property of individuals are at best misleading and at worst simply wrong. Demographic statisticians, such as Zuberi (2001) and

Holland (2008), have advanced a critique of the use of race as a binary, categorical, causal variable. Zuberi (2001) shows that this practice both reifies racial categories and distracts from the analytically absent causal agent (discrimination) located elsewhere in the social structure. Zuberi (2001) also shows how the use of race as a dummy variable that is either “off” or “on” in regression equations necessarily eclipses the contextual variability and contingency of race as a social category.

To avoid these problems, in this dissertation, I recognize the contingency of race while simultaneously arguing that the categories of race and gender are “durable” (Tilly 1998). Although both race and gender can change over the course of a lifetime (Penner & Saperstein, 2008; Saperstein, 2008), they are, for the most part, relatively stable categories along which goods and resources are distributed. Indeed, it is this very durability and the political struggles around classification that give race and gender much of their power (Tilly 1998). However, it is possible to treat the social category of race as “real in its consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928) while recognizing the historically and contextually contingent nature of race. Central to my argument is the contextual meaning of race and gender in the military, as conceptions of masculinity and racialized

labor vary in important ways from civilian life. Although soldiers certainly bring widely-shared conceptions of race and gender with them when they enlist (Tilly 1998), military-specific understandings are generated through incorporation and interactions within the organization (Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz, 2013).

### ***2.3 Race in the Military***

A large body of research on racial differences in outcomes focuses on how family structures (i.e., cultural factors transmitted through socialization) affect the mobility options of blacks (Wilson 1987, Lareau 2003). Much of this research argues that black families are "pathological" in that they are matriarchal (Moynihan 1965), and that black cultural patterns are "oppositional" and create a barrier to full citizenship because they reject dominant norms (Ogbu 1987). Although Ogbu's (1987) work has been challenged empirically and refuted in the context of schools (Tyson and Darity 2005), cultural explanations for black disadvantage are still extremely popular, and are a pillar of color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2006). This line of research has long suggested that the military is a particular haven for blacks, providing an experience that inculcates white norms and creates an environment based upon merit (Moynihan 1965). While not fully

discounting the effects of discrimination, this research tradition looks at unequal outcomes in labor markets and family processes as partly the result of black behavior and claims that the military greatly lessens both maladaptive behaviors and opportunities for discrimination. However, other scholars argue that these same factors may, in some cases, protect minorities from even worse outcomes through the use of gendered social networks that have evolved over time to protect minorities from discrimination (Stack 1974). However, neither of these explanations is sufficient to fully describe black military families. According to Moskos and Butler (1996), black army families are the vanguard of the black middle class, carrying on the role of what Du Bois called the "talented tenth" (1903). According to Du Bois, these blacks' values and norms most resemble those of whites, and progress for blacks as a whole in U.S. society is tied to their success. Recent research on this score argues that at least for WWII veterans, the military was indeed a pathway into the black middle class (Smith, Marsh, and Segal, 2012).

Existing peacetime research shows that blacks in the military are more conservative and are more likely to reject discrimination as an explanation for black

disadvantage (Lundquist 2004, Moskos and Butler 1996). Further, reversing civilian trends, blacks who have served are less likely to divorce than whites (Lundquist 2004), challenging the notions of black matriarchy and pathology. Finally, black military families are more likely to have children who attend desegregated schools and colleges (Moskos and Butler 1996), which in turn has been shown to improve black achievement. Indeed, black military families during peacetime seem the clearest possibility of fulfilling the military's mobility promise through their clear commitment to mainstream values and patterns of success. However, we know little about how war affects these outcomes or whether black peacetime gains are held post-military conflict. Further, scholars have paid little attention to how the structure of the military may alleviate some inequalities while naturalizing others. This is especially important, given that a belief in colorblindness may make individuals more likely to deny or justify perceived racial inequalities (SILVA & Forman, 2000).

Prior research focusing on veterans as a whole shows that those exposed to combat are more likely to divorce, and that the antisocial effects of PTSD (which is associated with marriage dissolution) may persist for up to 40 years post-combat

(MacLean and Elder 2007). How might these lingering effects of combat affect the relationship patterns of black families? There is some anecdotal evidence that gendered expectations of family roles vary, and that women exposed to combat may be expected to resume childcare and other "maternal" roles before they are psychologically able (Holmstedt 2009). Although nothing is written about the specific factors influencing post-service life for women of color, the general picture leads us to believe there are important, understudied factors influencing women's transition back to the family that may have racially specific implications.

The extent to which minority military service has led to civilian boundary shifts in labor markets is historically debatable, as it is well documented that blacks were excluded from many post-service opportunities including the G.I. Bill's education benefits after WWII (Katznelson 2005). However, researchers using audit methodology have recently shown that at least some blacks can currently benefit from a "veteran premium" in hiring (Kleykamp 2009), as they are more likely to get an initial callback than their civilian counterparts. Unfortunately, soldiers who served in combat positions do not see this benefit, which is especially pertinent to the future of lower-ranking

enlisted soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Further, this research only provides a sketch of discrimination at the point of hire. Lastly, we know little about how the organizational practices of military programs may systematically disadvantage some veterans.

A second reason that sociologists interested in racial and gendered inequality should focus on the military is the general over-representation of blacks in the military. Blacks are greatly over-represented in the military, as they comprise about 13% of the general population but approximately 24% of the armed forces. Women account for a full 14% of military personnel, but black women "are now represented in the military at nearly double their proportion in the civilian population" (Bailey 2004). However, as Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (1998) note, this overrepresentation of blacks in the military is concentrated in the lower ranks, with blacks of general officer rank hovering around 3 to 4 percent. Further, Zweigenhaft and Dumhoff (1998) claim that high-ranking blacks are not offered the elite post-service corporate jobs first identified by Mills (1956) in *The Power Elite*. Zweigenhaft and Dumhoff (1998) point out that blacks who do move up the ranks in the military tend to do so by adopting white norms. For instance, Colin Powell

cited his light skin, standard English, and claims that he "ain't that black" (1998, 112) as central to his mobility.

Despite indications that mobility opportunities within the military are still racialized, recent research using Pentagon data has found that minorities and women in the military report higher job satisfaction than their civilian compatriots (Lundquist 2008), implying that military policies do indeed militate against the vicissitudes of the civilian labor market. This finding is consistent with historical evidence: during WWI, for instance, black GI's in the North and South had profoundly different responses to service because their reference group was the social world outside of the barracks. Black southern GIs had higher levels of satisfaction than black northern GIs because of the relative deprivation of those to whom they were comparing themselves (Wu 2002). As Lundquist's data is drawn from a national sample, it is safe to assume that blacks serving in the military and comparing themselves to their black civilian counterparts' labor market options view themselves as relatively advantaged, especially in the context of the Great Recession which has seen skyrocketing black unemployment rates. However, although there is empirical evidence that blacks in the military are happier



with their work than their counterparts in the civilian labor market, this does not provide a robust test of the military's mobility promises—the true comparison should be to white soldiers possessing the same rank. When researchers compare black and white satisfaction, both African American men and women are more dissatisfied with the equal opportunity environment in the military than white men (B. L. Moore & Webb, 2000), belying my white respondents' claims of "reverse discrimination." Further, we know little about the structural factors that influence this dissatisfaction. My respondents indicate that the organizational environment and lack of formal avenues for remediation contribute to this unhappiness.

Although we have some information on military service as a "turning point" (Laub and Sampson 2003) in the lives of white men, we know very little about how service affects women, their families, and the broader society over their subsequent life-course. Further, the life-course approach— focused on experiences occurring after military service—provides little or no insight into the organizational processes of allocation that define the quality of race and gender relations within the military (Burk 2012). As research on intersectionality points out, women may experience a compound

disadvantage of multiple status oppressions (Collins 2005), so there is very little reason to believe that their experiences are similar to the male veterans who have previously been the focus of study. We know almost nothing about how female veterans fare upon returning home. Finally, the levels of black over-representation in the military make it a necessary site for the study of racial stratification, as any burdens produced through service may have a disproportionate impact on communities of color.

### **2.3.1 A Note on Gender**

This dissertation draws on the work of feminist scholars who see gender as a social construction (Andersen, 2005). Similar to race scholars who argue that race is not a natural category but rather a sociopolitical system grounded in sub- and super-ordination (Omi 1994a), I see gender as a cultural and political category of difference granting (or denying) access to resources. Importantly, privileges are granted through social processes such as facially meritocratic organizational processes (CASTILLA, 2008; 2012; Castilla & Benard, 2010) that appear legitimate and even natural. Further, notions of gender, like those of race and class, are reproduced and justified through widely diffuse and accepted ideologies (Ridgeway & Kricheli-Katz, 2013; Risman, 2004b). These

ideologies are historically and situationally contingent, allowing for change while keeping the basic fact of male domination relatively stable across social domains.

The military has strong gender bias built into its policies and procedures. In fact, the military still sees as legitimate policies that are considered outdated and blatantly discriminatory in the civilian labor market. Unlike racial integration, which the military now sees as central to unit cohesion and battle-readiness, fraternization between men and women is disallowed. Some scholars argue that physical, not social, distinctions mean men and women have different physical standards in the military (Snyder, 2003). Women have only recently been *formally* allowed to enter combat roles. However, no women currently inhabit these roles, as both the Army and Marines are reluctant to fully integrate (Lin 2014), despite the fact that record numbers of women have seen combat, and died, in these wars. Despite the formal ban on combat roles for women until 2013 , positions in the Military Police, driving in convoys and piloting have been open to women throughout the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. While these jobs are not classified by the military as combat roles, they have still put women in harm's way. Beyond the blatant discrimination against women in the military, a high degree of

segregation by specialty also endures. These facts, and the need for women to earn the “confidence and respect” of men, according to General David Petraeus (quoted in Alvarez 2008), point to a highly unequal gendered system in the military.

### ***2.3.2 Women’s Post-Service Transitions***

Given the increased role of women in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, we must incorporate the experiences of women into any valid analysis of mental health and treatment and reintegration challenges. The research on women veterans is itself gendered, with very little attention being paid to mobility factors such as post-service employment or education, and much more attention to mental health and caregiving. However, similar to men, a large portion of the research is focused on the effects of PTSD and the possible long-term consequences of this diagnosis. The research is largely structured around the implicit understanding that other post-service problems flow from the negative sociological consequences of a PTSD diagnosis and the effects of Military Sexual Trauma (MST). However, there is also some literature on the pre-service determinants of increased mental susceptibility to PTSD, including family conflict and sexual assault (Smith et al. 2008), possible gendered patterns of service utilization,

particularly of the Veterans Administration (Chatterjee et al. 2009), and reintegration into the family (Street et al. 2009). Researchers have noted that women are disproportionately represented among those afflicted by PTSD (Tanielian and Jaycox 2008). Anecdotal evidence from female veterans and care providers indicates that women suffering from PTSD encounter skepticism about their role in the war and difficulty getting their disorder diagnosed. They note that the symptoms of PTSD are seen as less socially acceptable in women, making them unlikely to seek treatment (Cave 2009). However, there may be more at work here, as fears of career retribution may make it difficult for veterans to report symptoms. Among female Vietnam veterans, PTSD has been shown to have effects on marriage and other family adjustment variables (Gold et al. 2007), yet it is not yet clear how these early problems will develop further into what Tanielian and Jaycox (2008) call a "cascading set of consequences" which can include "drug use, suicide, marital problems, and unemployment." As we will see in subsequent chapters, the women in my sample experienced many of these consequences.

In the military, women's reports of MST vastly outstrip those of men. For instance, although Kang and colleagues (2005) found increased PTSD among both genders

exposed to sexual trauma, women reported sexual harassment and assault at rates of 24% and 3.3%, respectively, dwarfing the .6% and .2% reported by men. While it is plausible that men are significantly under-reporting, especially in the context of a military whose culture is overtly masculine, it is unlikely differences of this magnitude are reducible to measurement error. Recent estimates of MST among samples of OEF/OIF veterans indicated that between 30-45% of female veterans are subject to this trauma (Zinzow et al. 2007). There are a number of reasons this type of trauma is particularly harmful across the subsequent life course of female veterans. First, "both war stress and sexual stress or sexual trauma were predictive of PTSD"; however, "sexual stress is 4 times as influential" in the subsequent development of PTSD than other war stresses (Goldzweig et al. 2006). Similarly, MST is more associated with poor mental health than similar assaults in the civilian population. Several scholars hypothesize that MST may have a greater effect on women veterans due to the added violation of trust in a warzone, where troops' lives depend upon one another (Street et al. 2009). This type of assault has also been linked to increased depression and drug abuse among women veterans (Goldzweig et al. 2006). A second factor making MST a particularly harmful

trauma in the lives of female veterans is the interactive effect it may have with other forms of social stressors in a combat zone. Whether the effects of multiple traumas are additive or multiplicative (Street et al. 2009), it is clear that the subsequent life course of women veterans who experience multiple exposures to violent events can be profoundly altered. Yet we have very little qualitative understanding of how women make meaning of these experiences in their daily lives. In the only qualitative study I encountered on women veterans, a female veteran describes how MST can interfere with the core life-course principle of personal agency, as dealing with the fallout from MST caused a profound reorientation of personal goals:

"When I went in I had this big plan. I was going to be in there 20 years and retire and travel and it didn't happen that way. Instead, I was sexually assaulted the first year and pretty much told, "If you can't handle it, get out." And then I couldn't talk to anybody about that...Nobody wanted to hear it, including the chaplain." (Sayer et al. 2009, 246).

Contrary to the narrative of military service as a positive turning point for men, the respondent above explains that her life was negatively reordered through service. The literature on women veterans couples this concern with their specific traumatic experiences during wartime with a heavy focus on treatment options for these veterans

and the larger care-giving environment to which they return (Sayer et al. 2009). However, the research on sexual trauma in the military still treats the problem of assault as the result of deviant individuals, rather than the expected outcome of a set of social relationships grounded in masculinity and the devaluation of women.

Although nothing is written about the specific factors influencing black women's transition to civilian life, the general picture leads us to believe there are important, understudied factors influencing women's transition back to their families that may have racially specific implications. First, women's post-service experiences may be influenced by factors such as the social expectation that women will be the primary caregivers in a family. This may be especially important for women, as women's reintegration experiences are not reducible to the effects of PTSD. "There was also evidence of a direct negative effect of combat exposure on family adjustment in addition to PTSD symptoms for women, suggesting that PTSD symptoms may not fully explain the deleterious aspects of war-zone stressor exposure on family adjustment problems for female veterans" (Monson et al. 2009). This finding implies that even for women with sub-clinical symptoms, the experience of life in a warzone can negatively impact subsequent



family life. Further, a recent report from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA 2009) on the status of women returning holds that nearly 40% of active duty military women have children. Women service members are also more likely to be single parents, with more than 30,000 single mothers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. This situation exacerbates childcare concerns for these women, and concerns about family relationships are more strongly related to female veterans' mental health than for men (Street et al. 2009). Again, qualitative research indicates the desire to reconnect with family may cause women to prioritize these relationships rather than seeking treatment for their psychological issues (Sayer et al. 2009). Similarly, the stresses of female soldiers are also taxing to their romantic relationships, with the marriages of women soldiers failing at three times the rate of their male counterparts (IAVA 2009). As the authors of this report point out, the data used to compile this figure may provide an undercount of the actual divorce levels for returning women, as they only examine active duty troops. However, research that examines the post-service transition for women also indicates higher levels of divorce, especially among women who have been exposed to trauma (Tanielian and Jaycox 2008). Women veterans may benefit from the potential social

support provided by a strong marriage (Hughes and Waite 2009, Frech and Williams 2007). Further, because a supportive social network influences treatment-seeking behavior, women veterans who lack these networks may be particularly unlikely to get treatment for any psychological issues (Sayer et al. 2009).

A final factor influencing familial support and reintegration for women is that mothers' absence may exacerbate behavioral issues among their children. This may be particularly challenging for women who are experiencing their own mental or physical health issues with reintegration. While this line of research clearly needs a more systematic explication, the possible side effects of combat are especially relevant to black women and their families, due to their extreme overrepresentation in the military population.

As with the study of mental health, this dissertation adds to our understanding of reintegration by adding a cross-racial comparison, as the vast majority of studies on family reintegration lack this key sociological distinction. In addition, the effect of traumatic "ambiguous loss" (Boss 2006) is understudied among military families, especially regarding how the phenomenon may fall along racial lines, as different

patterns of socialization have long been recognized in the literature (Stack 1974, Burton et al. 2010). The concept of ambiguous loss is especially relevant to families during wartime, as those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan may be psychologically absent (Boss 2006) from normal family routines when they return. Given the known issues with families of color in both the diagnosis and subsequent treatment trajectories of mental illness (McGuire and Miranda 2008), it is imperative that sociologists begin to study how families cope with and make meaning out of wartime experiences.

There are many recent calls to study the military in the life course perspective, and this is an extremely important aspect for sociologists to explore. However, I call for an organizational analysis in addition to life course perspectives, as women's post-service experiences may be influenced by factors such as the social expectation that women will be the primary caregivers in a family.

## **2.4 Critical Race Theory Meets Military Sociology**

In their classic of military sociology, *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army wWay*, Charles Moskos and Jon Sibley Butler (Moskos 1997) use the story of a group of black male soldiers sitting together in a Fort Hood, Texas, mess hall

to illustrate a wider point about race in the military. In their account, a single table in the hall had begun to be “monopolized by black soldiers” (Moskos & Butler, 3), apparently to the chagrin of their white fellow soldiers. To remedy this problem, “a white sergeant came over and told the blacks to sit at other tables with whites” (Ibid). The black soldiers who told this story were angry that they were singled out as the problem.

Despite the black soldiers’ frustration, Moskos and Butler tell this story to show that the military is proactive when it comes to racial issues, and they imply that forcing these soldiers away from their table was for the best. Interpreting this data through the lenses of the dominant white society (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), they see the white sergeant’s case as having merit. “This story has another remarkable point: that a white would take it upon himself to approach a table of blacks with that kind of instruction. The white sergeant’s intention, however naive or misdirected, was to end a situation of racial self-segregation”(3). According to this logic, the divisive and separatist black soldiers needed to be put in their place; they were failing to integrate. Moskos and Butler contrast this interaction favorably with the climate on college campuses, where blacks are allegedly allowed to practice this type of separatism with impunity, as authority

figures have been too cowed by political correctness. Like the findings throughout much of their volume, they imply that people of color in the military are simply supposed to accept and submit to the power imbalance in the situation. This story follows the racial common sense that sees separatism as stemming from minorities. Despite evidence of the entrenched racial inequality still prevalent in the military (Burk 2012), the vast majority of military scholars sees race relations in the military through this normative frame (Lundquist 2004, 2008, Teachman and Tedrow 2008, Usdansky et al. 2009).

From the perspective of critical race theory (Burton et al., 2010; Crenshaw 1991; Myers & Williamson, 2001), Moskos and Butler and other scholars in the tradition of military sociology misinterpret their data. Critical race theorists see the sergeant's action as an exercise of power that reinforced normative whiteness. Blaming people of color for racial separatism fundamentally misrepresents the historical and current racial realities of segregation (Massey and Denton 1993; Rugh and Massey 2010), which was founded and enforced by whites. In this section, I quickly review some of the key tenets of critical race theory and organizational approaches to stratification. I argue that critical race perspectives, with their focus on normative whiteness (McDermott 2005), power

(Roscigno 2011), the epistemological perspectives of stigmatized groups (Du Bois 1903), and oppression compounded through multiple identities (Holvino 2008), offer a better way to understand inequality in the military than traditional perspectives.

For critical race theorists, whiteness is a form of property and power (Harris 1995; Roediger 1999). This understanding grounds the construction of race in both material and symbolic dimensions (Beisel, 2007; Lewis, 2004). Historically, this combination of material resources and symbolic power has meant that people of color have been at a disadvantage when defining a situation as unequal. “Whites historically have had the luxury of racializing others without necessarily, except strategically, developing or invoking a strong racial consciousness.” (Lewis 2004, 262). This point comes through clearly in Moskos and Butler’s example. First, the white soldier noticed the people of color sitting together, but the other tables, presumably full of whites, were unremarkable. As a number of scholars of whiteness studies argue, this is because whiteness is seen as the normative category, unremarkable and therefore unremarked upon (Frankenberg 1993). “Blacks and other racial minorities are thought to bring race into situations that previously were understood, in their all-white formations, as

nonracial or as racially neutral" (Lewis 2004). Whites are the blank backdrops against which others have "race." Throughout this dissertation, I examine whites as a racial group with a worldview partially shaped by whiteness.

An understanding of race as an exercise of power also suffuses the work of critical race scholars. Racial inequality is ubiquitous—an ingrained feature of societies and entrenched in laws (Lopez 2006), organizations (Stainback et al. 2010), and institutions (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967). Further, change efforts often alter the form of racial or gender relations, while maintaining the underlying hierarchy. "What appears to be a reduction in inequality may only be a reconfiguration" (Acker 2006). For instance, organizational scholars have shown that despite the wide-scale adoption of anti-discrimination programs for both race and gender (Dobbin 2009; Dobbin & Kelly 2007; Kelly and Dobbin 1998), managers or commanders with power can undermine the effectiveness of these programs or use them against people of color. As Tilly notes, "People who control access to value-producing resources solve pressing organizational problems by means of categorical distinctions. Inadvertently or otherwise, those people set up systems of social closure, exclusion, and control" (Tilly 1998, 7-8). Although the

military has a general policy of integration and attempts to guard against cliques as undermining morale, whites seated by themselves in an ostensibly integrated area are equally self-segregating. As the black soldiers Moskos and Butler (1996) interviewed point out, whites could easily just as easily have joined their table. However, because the white sergeant had organizational power, he was able to police the social boundaries (Lamont & Molnár 2002) and place the blame for racial tension on people of color. Throughout my data, a similar process is at work for both people of color and women who speak up about exclusion.

The divergent analytical focus between critical race scholars and mainstream analysts is more than simply a difference in perspective. Building on a long history of philosophical work that gives epistemological privilege to those at the bottom of an oppressive system (Hegel 1977; Marx 1848; Du Bois 1903; Mills 1997; Collins 2004; Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008), critical race theory sees stigmatized groups as capable of accurately describing their realities. “The position of people of color in a racialized social system allows them to see things whites cannot see, do not want to see, or simply, are ‘apathetic’ about...Hence, the explanations emerging from this alternative episteme are



not simply different, but we argue, *better*" (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008, 525, emphasis in original). Feminist standpoint theorists (Naples 2003) have also argued that ruling relations are normalized in everyday life, and we can best understand these relations by collecting and interpreting the narratives of those subject to racial, class, and gendered forms of domination.

Finally, critical race theorists see gender as a social structure (Risman 2004) that works in tandem with other social statutes denying or granting social privileges. Rather than methods that examine stigmatized identities as mutually exclusive categories, intersectionality scholars are interested in the "inclusion of the experiences of multiply marginalized persons or groups" (Choo & Ferree 2010). The effects of discrimination or exclusion based on a single category may not be easily deducible, nor should categories be examined outside of their inter-relations. Further, these scholars recognize that race or gender alone as analytic categories often offer insufficient explanatory purchase given internal group differences (McCall 2005). Scholars of race and ethnicity, gender, and class are too often separated in their scholarship by artificial boundaries. This is not to say that these social groupings do not exhibit particularistic features: intersectional

perspectives, coupled with scholarship on organizational practices that reproduce inequality, provide a sounder basis from which to examine inequality in the military.

## **2.7 Discussion**

Similar to Tilly's (1998) analysis of general principles of stratification that cut across bounded social categories, I see punitive empathy as a general mechanism reinforcing categorical discrimination that may apply across several domains. I focus on the shifting nature of social exclusion embedded in organizational programs. Of course, as I have stated above, some specific social categories do have particular expressions that are not reducible to other categorical differences. In the military formal exclusions on the basis of gender are still common and even expected, such as exclusions from combat and Special Forces units, or the variability surrounding physical fitness standards. The military often claims these forms of exclusion are not actually discrimination, but rather reflections of "natural differences" that should be respected. Beyond these formal structures of exclusion, it is also clear that cross-racial homo-social bonds exist that are openly and expressly hostile to women. These informal bonds are also "structural," in

the sense that they are governed by an ideology of male supremacy that may be threatened by the inclusion of women, and they are patterned and predictable.

In the next chapter, I examine how mental health reports are sometimes dealt with by the military. I show that although these programs are allegedly designed to help soldiers, reporting can often exacerbate problems for veterans.

### **3. Friendly Fire: Punitive Empathy and Mental Health Careseeking in the Military**

#### ***3.1 Andre's Story***

*"The tank had completely blew to pieces. When it hit the landmine...all of the ammunition stuff started going off inside, and a couple of the guys got caught inside the tank... the seat had embedded into [the driver's] spinal cord, and they was trying to pull him out. He was screaming; they couldn't pull him out. He was – he burnt on fire."*

Andre and Kenny hit it off immediately the night they met; they swapped stories for hours, sharing dinner together, and learned they had attended neighboring high schools. Andre wasn't on the patrol the next day when Kenny was killed—but he

watched as the tank was towed back to base with the tarp-covered body inside. Andre remains haunted by this final image of his friend's body, glimpsed as the wind lifted the tarp.

Andre shared the story of Kenny's death to help me understand the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) diagnosis Andre received when he came home. Andre's wartime experiences transformed him. Before the war he was "jovial," always clowning around and deescalating neighborhood conflicts. His ex-wife—they divorced after his deployment—also said he'd changed. When he returned home, Andre was part of a mental health-screening program aimed at identifying PTSD among combat veterans. He said that during the screening, "the flood-gates just opened up. I didn't know it was bothering me that much until, you know, they had me really talking about it. And I just started crying and I couldn't stop." Unfortunately, the screening compounded Andre's problems. With PTSD, he couldn't redeploy. And as his civilian job was linked to enlistment, "that's how I ended up losing my job, because to hold my job, you have to be a standing member in the...National Guard. I have to be a member of the Guard to keep my federal job."

Andre experienced traumas that most of us cannot fathom. Following this job loss, Andre's problems only worsened. The backlog at the VA kept him out of needed treatment for over a year, and towards the end of the interview, he explained the following:

Andre: I haven't been in and sat down and talked with their doctor in over a year. They've cancelled my last two appointments because they're—they're so short-staffed, it's always – you know, and (sighs) you know, it was – there were times where, you know, I could have nightmares about my own funeral—a-and stuff like that, and wondered, you know, what's the point of living? But, I didn't want to say anything to the doctors about that 'cause I didn't want to be, you know, not really locked up, but just put in a psych ward or anything like that. 'Cause I-I-I-I know it can happen. You know, I have known people that, you know, and once you do that, i-it's – you know, career, everything else and, you know, people looking at you differently.

Victor: Oh. You mean if you tell the doctors that?

Andre: Yeah.

Andre's experiences illustrate the "long term cascading consequences" (Tanielian 2008) faced by veterans with mental health issues. Every area of his life was affected, until he questioned the very value of living. His story, as well as those of other veterans, shows that policies designed to ease reintegration often hurt soldiers. Popular, well-meaning programs, such as mental health screenings, mark soldiers as trouble-makers

unfit for service in a process I call “punitive empathy”: an organizational mechanism through which helpful and publicly popular programs such as mental health screenings exacerbate problems for soldiers by marking them as troublemakers, unfit for service or work. Andre’s post-service distress was dramatically worsened by the events subsequent to his PTSD diagnosis. While the military points to these programs as evidence that mental health issues are being taken seriously, service members who report problems have a different version of events.

Here’s the paradox: Andre’s screening was meant to help him; instead, he lost his job. Because of this dynamic, veterans often hide their mental health problems or seek help away from the military. For many of my respondents, the ravages of combat are written on their bodies, in slumped shoulders, broken speech, and tears. In searching for meaning in their experiences, their anguish makes it clear why many veterans are reticent to talk. Some have learned that discussing war comes with a stiff social price tag. Consistent with a large body of literature on veteran mental health issues (Vogt 2011), family and friends often don’t understand, and may condemn them for their actions in combat.

Punitive empathy in the military reinforces this culture of silence. In this chapter, I begin by showing how organizational theory can enrich our understanding of the problems surrounding mental health among service members in the context of the current wars. Second, I illustrate how military procedures for reporting mental health issues burden those who come forward. Third, I discuss why veterans exposed to traumas may follow a different pattern than what is documented elsewhere about avoiding subsequent traumas. Finally, I claim that these patterns can also be explained by the amount of control the military is able to exert over service members.

#### **4.1.1 Integrating Organization Theory into Studies of the Military**

In Irving Goffman's (1959) classic distinction, a presentational "front stage," where individuals showcase their best selves, conceals a "back stage," where unpleasant or repressed facts are revealed. Scholars John Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977) tied this insight to the way organizations derive legitimacy in part by conforming, rhetorically, to external "front stage" constituencies. They claimed,

Many of the positions, policies, programs, and procedures of modern organizations are enforced by public opinion...and by the definitions of negligence and prudence used by the courts. Such elements of formal structure are manifestations of powerful institutional rules which

function as highly rationalized myths that are binding on particular organizations (344).

These myths often resonate powerfully with widely held cultural beliefs about the way things like equal opportunity and fairness *should* operate. This front stage conformity reinforces the legitimacy of an organization by showing that organizational values are broadly in line with those of the wider society.

However, Meyer and Rowan recognized that this conformity causes problems when it conflicts with other organizational goals. They claim that behind the scenes,

Conformity to institutional rules often conflicts sharply with efficiency criteria and, conversely, to coordinate and control activity in order to promote efficiency undermines an organization's ceremonial conformity and sacrifices its support and legitimacy. To maintain ceremonial conformity, organizations that reflect institutional rules tend to buffer their formal structures from the uncertainties of technical activities by becoming loosely coupled, building gaps between their formal structure and actual work activities. (340)

Building on these insights, a number of scholars have shown that organizational myths offer "facades of conformity disconnected from actual practices" (Hallett 2010). For instance, Kelly and Dobbin (1998) examine the historical implementation of equal opportunity laws. While the mythology of these laws claims that they serve as an



effective institutional check on organizational discrimination, in reality, their effectiveness has been variable, depending on the political winds (i.e., waxing or waning external support for such laws) and the strength of entrenched interests (see also, Dobbin 2009; Dobbin & Kelly, 2007). Scholars have also found that rule-breaking in the form of decoupling can be *tacitly directed by organizational leaders* (Martin et al. 2013). According to these scholars,

By decoupling external pressures from internal goals like the production of goods and services, organizations are able to appear compliant while ensuring stable production. Top managers and other organizational leaders...are often in the position of being able to make decisions and impose rules that satisfy external audiences while simultaneously seeing to it that subordinates' incentives militate against actually following such rules. (563)

The benefits of this sort of directed decoupling are clear for dealing with contradictory organizational goals. Managers (or in the case of the military, commanders) can persuasively argue to the public that organizational goals are in line with broadly accepted cultural norms. Deviations from these norms are the result of "bad apples," who can be punished for infractions that were largely predictable given contradictory organizational goals. This ensures that those at the top of the organizational hierarchy

both have their goals met and are insulated from repercussion stemming from infractions. Further, we can see that this type of directed decoupling can have serious consequences for contentious organizational goals, such as the enforcement of mental health reporting procedures. Lapses can be based upon individual commanders or psychologists, while the goals of the overall mission are not sacrificed. Rather than providing a strict guide for action, then, processes of decoupling create lines of possibilities with which organizations can respond to changing circumstances.

Scholars studying a host of institutions, including schools (Hallett 2010) and corporations, (S. M. Collins, 2011), have demonstrated internal institutional practices that are at odds with stated organizational policies. In fact, this disjuncture happens at when there is a lack of organizational commitment to a policy (Zucker 1987), something sociologists should expect when studying stigmatized identities. Military sociologists, however, have largely neglected the organizational literature on decoupling and norms when examining mental health. The dominant frames of analysis in military sociology are life course theories that largely focus on the transition from combat and long-term trends in marriage, income, family life, and educational attainment (MacLean and Elder

2007). While this literature is part of a rich tradition that tells us much about service and the subsequent life course, it tells us little about the organizational factors that encourage or discourage mental health care seeking.

For the military, conformity to publicly stated institutional rules surrounding veterans with mental health problems conflicts with wartime goals. In order to overcome these contradictions, Meyer and Rowan argue that organizations' back stage practices may be "decoupled" from publicized policy. This "decoupling" creates discretion in the application of policies and allows those with organizational power to reinforce traditional hierarchal boundaries of race, gender, or mental health status. Prototypically hierarchal, with entrenched and legitimated inequality based upon rank, the military provides a special case for understanding how organizations—despite perhaps good intentions—can contribute to reproducing inequalities.

The process of punitive empathy provides analytical purchase for understanding the complexities of institutional responses to external pressures for equality and compassion while maintaining old balances of power and privilege. In particular, Department of Defense mental health programs demonstrate the military's commitment

to helping veterans, sometimes with negative consequences. The “back stage” of these programs—where service members interact with commanders, fellow soldiers, and intricate bureaucracy—leaves them vulnerable to retribution, hazing, or worse. Punitive empathy allows organizations to essentially serve two masters—public pressure and internal goals. Spokespersons point to programs as evidence that external constituencies’ issues are taken seriously while internally, service members who report problems are punished, leading them to hide their issues or seek help elsewhere. In essence, *having* a program *becomes* the entire program, serving a public relations function for organizations while further stigmatizing individuals. An organizational myth of equal treatment permeates the public face of military relations. But veterans tell a different story about how these programs actually function.

Although my research analyzes punitive empathy in the military, this process can be found across institutions. Organizations require conformity to operate, and those who do not fit organizational molds—because of racial, gender, or other differences including mental health problems—may be targeted for harassment. However, organizations do not exist in a vacuum, and societal pressures often compel

organizations to conform to prevailing notions of equal opportunity and compassion. For instance, the civil and women's rights movements forced organizations to adopt front-stage policies to alleviate endemic racial and gender discrimination (Winant 2000, Acker 2006). Despite these reforms, racial and gender inequalities persist in nearly every organization sociologists study (Acker 2006; Pager & Shepherd 2008; Reskin 2012). A similar crisis in legitimacy was created for the military following Vietnam, when activist anti-war veterans and psychologists developed the diagnosis of PTSD, eventually forcing the military and the VA to adopt policies to deal with psychological damage (Scott 1990).

However, as with the adoption of anti-discrimination policies, considerable issues may surround the implementation of programs to support mental health, especially if policies conflict with internal organizational goals. Bosses, managers, or commanders with organizational power can punish those who come forward with problems, strengthening the very institutional inequalities programs were designed to undermine.

For the military, having deployable soldiers fit for combat regardless of trauma—Force Readiness, in military jargon—is a paramount internal goal. Indeed, the Department of Defense’s report evaluating the effectiveness of its mental health programs claims, “the DoD and the VA provide an array of prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation options to maintain force readiness for the DoD and to enable veterans to function well in daily life” (2010, 4). This policy explicitly recognizes that military efforts to ease mental health problems contribute to force readiness. Key in this statement is the fact that although this policy is aimed at helping, it is not altruistic. The military *needs* soldiers to be mentally able to deal with the vicissitudes of combat; otherwise, it cannot achieve wartime goals. However, force readiness may be at odds with front stage policies blunting the psychological impact of combat’s horrors. When front stage goals conflict with force readiness, programs designed to identify people needing help may instead serve as a sorting mechanism, removing those seen as damaged. Indeed, my respondents feared exactly this, locating discrimination at the nexus between a militarily stigmatized disorder (be it mental or physical) and organizational goals.

For instance, when I asked Doug, a soldier who had spent his entire career in the military, if he worried about repercussions for reporting health problems, he replied,

Doug: I was always worried about being medically discharged while in the service. Is that answering that question?

Victor: Yeah. Yeah.

Doug: I always had that fear and it wasn't because of TBI [Traumatic Brain Injury] because I wasn't diagnosed with any of that...My biggest fear, while you're in the service, that's how the Army got rid of you. If it was trying to downsize, they always look for, again, they want the cream of the crop, so, they got rid of you year by year. Substance abuse programs...They used to chapter you out for these things...So, what am I getting at here, so I try to avoid the medical facility as much as I possibly can because I don't want to be on that radar screen of being chaptered out.

Doug's experience was not uncommon among my respondents. Veterans consistently reported that they hid health conditions in order to keep their job and remain in the theatre of combat. Although some scholars argue that the masculine culture of the military is the primary driver behind veterans' fears of reporting incidents (Hoge et al., 2004), this may not fully explain why service members avoid seeking care. The masculine culture of shaming serves a function for the military by keeping recruits active, but back stage policies and programs may also maintain veterans' silence.

## 4.2 Bringing the War Home

Returning veterans needing mental health care face a dire situation. In 2007 the Washington Post ran a series of articles claiming that Walter Reed, the nation's premier Veterans Affairs Hospital, was systematically foundering. The articles chronicled a labyrinthine bureaucracy that was failing to heal the physical and psychological scars of combat. Subsequently, a steady stream of lurid media accounts of the VA's treatment of veterans across the country painted a picture of an organization rife with reports of purposeful misdiagnosis (Kors 2008), chronic misconduct, ensnared in red tape, with a physically crumbling infrastructure (Cloud 2007). Recently, the Inspector General for the Department of Veterans Affairs reported that veterans are waiting, on average, nearly three months for preliminary screenings (Inspector General 2012). Poor and delayed treatment can have particularly negative effects for PTSD sufferers because the syndrome, left unchecked, can result in alcoholism, severe depression, anxiety disorder, and intense psychological distress (Flannery 1999). These problems are reflected in the increasing numbers of suicides for veterans and active duty troops, which now exceed combat deaths in Afghanistan. These media accounts imply that individual deviant



actors (proverbial bad apples) are largely responsible for poor outcomes, and that remediation should be directed at those leading actors, as for instance when the general in charge of Walter Reed Medical Center was fired after media reports of consistently poor and slow treatment of veterans (Cloud 2007). Yet this interpretation may be doing veterans a further disservice. First, by locating the cause in individual actors, and ignoring organizational constraints, systematic problems surrounding the design and implementation of helping programs go ignored. Second, and for my purposes a more important point, is that the VA is often dealing with the aftermath, and not the root cause, of veterans' mental health issues. At best, the VA is doing triage on a problem that begins with military culture and exposure to combat.

My respondents indicate that beyond the buckling VA system, the military influences veterans' ability and willingness to get mental health treatment. Veterans often recognize mental health problems while they are still on active duty. For instance, Billy, a white male in his mid-30s, said, "I know I didn't get all the PTSD stuff from that one deployment. It was a consistent, continual thing. Deployment after deployment it got worse and worse." Historically and presently, mental health care in the military has

threaded an uneasy course between ensuring the internal goal of force readiness and psychological treatment. According to sociologist Wilbur Scott (1990), what was known as "shell shock" during WWI was thought to afflict "weaklings." When the U.S. military joined the war effort, psychiatrists were to ensure soldiers returned to combat quickly following trauma exposure. Mental health assessments were "designed in part to keep fighting men as close to the front as possible" (Finley 2011, 91) despite their mental health problems. Short-term force readiness was a more immediate concern than soldiers' long-term mental health, and those complaining of severe distress risked the labels of coward or malingerer. In the context of a rigidly hierarchal organization like the military, malingering is still an extremely deviant behavior. The 115th article of the Uniform Code of Military Justice governs malingering, and those found guilty are subject to a possible court marshal and the potential loss of any benefits accrued during their service. This creates a powerful disincentive for soldiers to report their symptoms, through both the stigmatizing effects of the deviance designation and the threatened loss of economic benefits. Soldiers with much to gain from acceptance of the disorder now had to weigh the substantial possible costs of having their claims denied.

This contradiction between force readiness (an individual's mental health, which determines his or her capacity to serve) and possible organizational retaliation for attempting to address mental health concerns is central to understanding the issues facing veterans of the current wars. Although sociologist Alair Maclean (2010) has shown that men who experience combat are more likely to be unemployed and disabled for the rest of their lives, we know little about the organizational mechanisms shaping post-service life and work for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. The 2.3 million veterans deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan experienced a historically unprecedented cycle of service. These wars' long duration, combined with stop-loss policies which involuntarily extend service members' tours and poor opportunities in the recessionary civilian labor market, have created a situation where service members are forced to return to war when they might have left the military. Multiple deployments have increased the risk of trauma exposure, as there is a linear relationship between combat exposure and the risk of PTSD (Hoge et al., 2004). Nearly 20% of returning vets have been diagnosed with PTSD (Tanielian 2008), and rates of traumatic brain injury (TBI), depression, and military sexual trauma (MST)—harassment or assaults often perpetrated by fellow

soldiers or superiors—are also high. Another historical twist of these wars is that despite the formal ban, women are in combat. Insurgents’ asymmetrical warfare has erased traditional notions of the “front lines,” as Improvised Explosive Devices (IED’s) indiscriminately strike both “support” and combat roles. Following their wartime experiences, female service members experience higher rates of PTSD and MST than their male counterparts.

Despite these facts, many veterans and active-duty service members suffer in silence rather than seeking treatment. And if they do seek treatment, many do so away from the military’s services, where they fear repercussions in the form of sabotaged careers, hazing through extra duty, or expulsion from the military. Thus, military estimates of mental health disorders may be undercounts of the true psychological costs of conflict. Qualitative evidence of the complications of homecoming is vitally important if sociologists and policymakers hope to fully understand how the vicissitudes of combat shape veterans’ lives.

#### ***4.2.1 Help That Hurts: Mental Health Care and Punitive Empathy***

Although I expected veterans to discuss mental health problems associated with their service, I was surprised that many hid their issues from the military. The finding that service members feared reporting mental health issues arose organically (Charmaz 2006; Small 2009) during the interviews: in my original questionnaire, I assumed commanders were aware of the psychological costs of combat, and soldiers could safely report symptoms. After all, the military has implemented mental health screenings at multiple points during service, and the literature on mental health and the military has long been clear on the deleterious effects of combat. Veterans' stories corrected my faulty assumptions about mental health help-seeking. Respondents' fear of repercussions led to a central question: if the military and the general public acknowledge that combat can have life-long psychological effects, why do some veterans avoid getting care?

Andre, whose narrative I shared at the beginning of this chapter, experienced traumas nearly unfathomable for most civilians. His story, and those of other veterans who have opened their lives to me, shows that programs designed to ease reintegration

can hurt. The military has multiple programs in place to help with mental health issues affecting soldiers, including mandatory post-deployment mental health screenings. Psych-techs are available in the field and on base, and mental health debriefings are provided to returning soldiers. The “front stage” of these apparently empathetic programs recognizes service members’ potential problems and tries to offer solutions—bolstering the combat mission and reputation on the home front. Fearing retribution, the soldiers whose stories I share below avoided seeking mental health care through the military, because behind the scenes, military policies can have consequences.

For instance, Joe, like many soldiers, joined the military for college tuition. A black single father of two in his mid-forties, he deployed to Afghanistan and experienced anxiety disorder and severe depression after combat. However, Joe avoided the military’s health care system. He was aware of the military’s media outreach encouraging soldiers to get mental health care, recalling, “they’ll come on TV and talk about, ‘Oh, generals go see the doctor and they talk, you know, they get help.’” Joe’s voice was tinged with disgust as he implied that this outreach was, at best, disingenuous.

I don’t give a flying flip what they say...If that comes up in your file, you’re done. That next rank, you’re finished. You’re finished. You are

done! If you are an enlisted guy...and it goes in your file that you went to the Gulf and you came back and you went to see somebody for major depressive disorder...you won't reenlist. They won't let you. You're done. Further, Joe had little faith that his relatively high-ranking status would help him. He added, "if you're an officer, you're especially done...I was a senior officer. So, I knew that I had to protect myself." Joe's self-protection took the form of seeking care through an outside psychiatrist. For 18 months he got therapy twice a week, but hid his condition from the military to avoid repercussions.

Despite the military's front stage proclamations of support, Joe feared getting mental health care through the military. He describes a back stage where a psychological disorder would harm a soldier's career. If commanders think a soldier's mental illness impedes the military's internal organizational goals, the mission comes first, according to Joe.

As Joe's experience shows, although the military encourages soldiers to seek mental health care, and tries to de-stigmatize it through media profiles of high-ranking officials getting help, there is still a pervasive fear that getting care will harm careers. These concerns are well founded: several of the lower-ranking soldiers I interviewed explained that there were indeed repercussions for telling the truth about their health-

care needs. For instance, Carlos, a black man in his late twenties who joined the Army because he wanted a better life for his kids, argues that military procedures led him to cover up his mental health issues. During his group debriefing in Baghdad on the day his unit was scheduled to leave Iraq, he “told the truth” about his condition and was punished for it by being forced to stay in the war zone. When he was questioned about his mental health status, he said, “I cannot believe I went, I went through this. I felt like a lot of my morals, a lot of things that were put in me were at conflict—And I was just honest. Like, ‘I’m tense, I get angry quicker.’” The other soldiers in the room remained quiet about their possible issues, behavior Carlos claimed was driven by their knowledge of what happened to those who were honest about their problems. As the other soldiers got up to get their plane home, Carlos was told that he would be staying in Iraq for observation. Carlos decided that in the future, when confronted with questions by the military about his mental health, he would tell them whatever he needed to in order to get out of what he felt was a dangerous situation. He mimicked his part of the conversation: “I’m fine! I’m great! Send me home! I’m great! What do you want to hear? You [want] me to write a love story? I’ll write that, too! Just get me out



of here.” In this case, we can see punitive empathy in that Carlos’ behaving exactly as he was instructed to do by his superiors led to his being forced to stay in the war zone. The military’s alleged concern for the damaged soldier, ironically, kept him exposed to the constant stresses of the war zone, which had caused the distress in the first place.

Carson was also wary of reporting his mental health problems to his commanders. A white male in his late 20s, he served two tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, where he saw considerable combat. When I asked him about his mental health, he told me that although he lacked a formal diagnosis, he experienced anger, irritability, difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping, and hyper-vigilance. He was worried about these conditions, as they had affected his family life and his ability to stay in the military. When we met to talk, he was in the process of leaving the military, as these symptoms made it difficult for him to continue to perform his job. When I asked whether soldiers should be worried about repercussions for reporting their symptoms, he had this to say:

Like if - say I wanted to -you know, I’m fucked up in the head. I want to go claim PTSD and I want to go get help, that fucks me for the rest of my life. I can’t get a conceal and carry, can’t get a fucking pistol, probably won’t go any higher in my military career and they’ll probably force me

to retire eventually.

Victor: Uh-huh.

Carson: So, why even say anything? You're just going to get screwed.

Victor: Well, do you think other vets think that way or — —

Carson: They should. If they don't, they're dumb. That's why I don't say a word about nothing.

Carson's reticence to get help was framed as the smart response to a set of circumstances he felt the military enforced. He worried that his career opportunities would be cut short and that these sanctions would carry over into civilian life, as he (erroneously) believed that he would be barred from getting a firearm if he had a diagnosis. He further thought that those who didn't consider the possible repercussions of a diagnosed mental health issue were stupid.

Punitive empathy also influences veterans' willingness to report sexual assault, which female service members experience at twice the rate of civilian women (Mulhall & America 2009). Sexual assaults can increase the risks of PTSD and depression on subsequent deployments, since prior trauma increases the likelihood of developing the disorder (Zinzow et al. 2007). Similar to the programs outlined above for mental health, women who experience sexual assaults may avoid reporting attacks out of worry about the military's response. Such worry is realistic: women soldiers have much to fear if they

report an assault, as media accounts and my respondents describe women being discharged, not supported, after coming forward.

Cherrie joined the military to escape a rough childhood and a string of bad relationships. Cherrie had tremendous family responsibilities, including helping to care for her HIV-positive mother. Despite these barriers, Cherrie had a remarkable career, earning two masters' degrees during her service. A calm and pensive Latina woman, she credited the military for offering her opportunities absent in civilian life. Cherrie was on leave when she went to a party at a lifelong friend's house. While there, she was drugged and sexually assaulted. "I wanted to go to the police but I was ready to deploy. And I thought, I am not going to go to the cops because if they open up a case, I'm not going to deploy. Plus, it's going to affect my career because they are going to ask what drugs, let's do a drug test, and you can get discharged." Although a civilian had committed the assault, Cherrie feared that dealing with the military was too risky. In fact, she feared being doubly victimized by being forced out of her job. So rather than report the assault, Cherrie decided to "push this away, and go on deployment and do what I have to do and deal with it later." This decision put her at greater risk, as her

deployment exposed her to further trauma: she experienced several mortar attacks while providing mental health services to active duty troops.

Despite Cherrie's accomplishments, achieved through military opportunities, her time in the service incurred a psychological cost. Rather than seeking help through the military, she looked beyond the borders of the institution that had taught her to fight for others, but not for herself. Tellingly, since she has returned from her second deployment, she continues to seek mental health care outside of the military. Further, she blamed her mental health issues for the loss of some of her G.I. Bill benefits after she withdrew from a prestigious advanced degree program when she couldn't cope. Ironically, Cherrie is herself a psych-tech, screening returning vets for the very problems she is afraid to reveal to her command. She felt this role gave her insight into the sometimes-punitive nature of military mental health programs.

Not every veteran I spoke with thought that these types of repercussions were unfair or unnecessary. In fact, in line with research that argues that organizations must appear legitimate in order to keep working, several of the veterans I spoke with agreed that these repercussions existed, but defended them,

arguing that they were central to the military's ability to perform its duty and contributed to a strong fighting force. Colin, a white man in his mid-30s who did two tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan, had this to say when I asked about possible repercussion:

I mean, without a doubt...you do not want a report [of] psychological problems, or mental problems in a unit where you cannot have mental problems. So it sounds bad and I know everybody wants to say so, you know, well we'll, there's gonna be no repercussions but there really should be, I mean (laugh) I mean, that's the reality of it. I mean, once you've, and once you say that you can't go get security clearances or get certain jobs if you've ever claimed any type of mental [issue]...the military doesn't like that, there's a lot of units that if you've ever been diagnosed with something like that or been on medication for it, they, you can't get into."

Colin accepts that repercussions for mental health issues are simply a cost of doing business in the military. He has accepted as legitimate the disciplinary function of these types of programs. Ironically, this stance of knowing that reporting a psychological issue can harm career prospects, *according to Colin's logic*, actually makes their predicament worse, as it means they are more likely to end up on missions with soldiers who aren't mentally fit, as these soldiers know to hide their problems if they want to stay in the theatre.

Brad's experiences also show just how serious not attending to a mental health issues. He tells a story of a sergeant with a severe alcohol abuse issue and the result of his not getting mental health care. When I asked if people should fear repercussions for seeking counseling. Brad provided an example I include at length here to provide the full story.

I think – especially, in the line, you could lose your position. So, say you have a mental health issue and you're a squad leader. We had a team leader that had like a huge drinking problem, like dying of self-asphyxiation or whatever, like, swallowed his own vomit and died. Like, the dude had a huge drinking problem and everybody knew he had a huge drinking problem. We tried to get him help a couple of times, but we – they didn't want him to look bad...But so say you send this guy for help all these times and that shows up every time that he's going for help or he's missing training or to actually get him help, to really help this guy, you have to pull him out of his job and put him somewhere else. Well, they're not going to give you credit for working...I mean, if this guy has got to be off the line for six months getting counseling for alcohol abuse, like, I can't say he worked and he was a great NCO for six months, because he wasn't. I mean, that's just stupid. And then, somebody else is going to come up through the ranks and kiss ass or do whatever and, like, take his spot. So, you kind of – if you like the guy, you help him, or you think you're helping him, and kind of try and, like, hide it. And I think what happened with him is that he had an episode where he actually snapped and he took off one day. Like, right after he got his promotion. The dude went to the ocean and he was like, 'I'm gone. I'm never coming back.' And they, like, called him and talked to him, 'Like, hey, come back (inaudible). It's going to be okay.' And he was just like, 'I can't handle

the pressure of leaving. I don't want to do all this stuff.' And they brought him back; he was, like, back the next day. And as a private I'm like, 'What happened, Sergeant Blake?' And he was like, 'I'm fine. Everything's cool.' I mean, he never went to counseling for that, like, as far as I know. And they feel like they're doing him a service by taking care of him and I – so, it's a weird Catch-22 that way.

In this case, although everyone recognized the sergeant had a deadly drinking problem, they helped him conceal the issue. "Not wanting him to look bad" meant that the attempts to get him help weren't pursued to the end, because if they were, his career would suffer. Further, by calling the military's procedures surrounding this type of problem a "Catch-22," Peter recognizes that this is a contradictory situation in which the military leaves soldiers with two bad choices—get help and risk job loss or worse, or hide this issue to maintain your livelihood. This contradiction cost this soldier his life.

#### **4.3. Punitive Empathy Beyond the Military**

The United States has been at war in Afghanistan for more than 12 years (with combat troops scheduled to remain in Afghanistan at least through 2014), and troops have only recently returned home from Iraq. In the coming years, the strain on the Veterans Affairs health care system will continue, and the number of those diagnosed

with PTSD, depression, and anxiety will increase. And although the military has implemented hundreds of new programs aimed at addressing these issues, the most recent comprehensive report from the Institute of Medicine at the National Academy of Science acknowledges that these programs' effectiveness is largely unknown. My research has identified one potential barrier to these programs' effectiveness, one that must be taken seriously in order to address veterans' mental health problems. Despite the military's front stage endorsement of its mental health programs, veterans like Joe and Cherrie still fear reprisals for seeking mental health care and avoid these programs as a result. Ultimately, calls to honor and support troops will do little until policy makers in the military address the punishments embedded in military mental health programs.

Beyond the military, the process of punitive empathy provides sociologists with a conceptual tool explaining the gap between word and deed in organizations. Punitive empathy has broad implications for understanding the reproduction of institutional inequality. As sociologist Vincent Roscigno shows (2007), women reporting workplace sexual harassment "are often exposed, and punished," through the very anti-



discrimination programs designed to remedy the harassment. Roscigno claims that in many cases, “workplace responses to harassment are as much a part of the problem as the harassment itself,” as these responses compound problems for women workers. Similarly, sociologist Adia Harvey Wingfield (2010), shows that diversity programs can harm people of color. She recounts the story of a mandatory workplace diversity training—an allegedly safe space for talking about racial issues—during which a black woman complained about the racial climate and was promptly fired. In these examples, the backstage implementation of a program undermines stated front-stage goals, reinforcing traditional workplace hierarchies. Any serious attempt to deal with organizational inequality must move beyond front stage proclamations to examine actual institutional practices compounding the problems they were designed to undermine.

### **3.4.1 Conclusion**

In the next chapter, I draw on the insight of these scholars to show how organizational arrangements influence racial and gender discrimination in the military. I build upon the concept of punitive empathy by showing that, although the military has

equal opportunity policies and clear procedures for reporting discrimination, the organizational structure of the military can inhibit or even shut down these reports. I also argue that we need organizationally specific accounts of racial and gender discrimination, as neither traditional research on racial attitudes (e.g., Allport 1954), or more recent work on “new racism” (Bonilla-Silva 2010), can explain the types of race or gender talk experienced by veterans.

## **5. “We’re all Brothers Here”: Race and Gender in the Military**

“We have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago.”

(Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam,” 1968)

“The Army, like many other organizations, has had great levels of diversity for quite some time; however, it may not have always exercised the greatest efforts of inclusiveness.”

(Jenkins, 2012).

### **5.1 Chapter Preface**

On a cold October night in Afghanistan, 2010, Private Danny Chen was found dead from a single, apparently self-inflicted, gunshot wound to the head. Chen was

repeatedly called a “gook, chink, and Dragonlady” (Gonnerman, 2013) by his fellow soldiers, a string of racialized and gendered attacks implying deviation from the assumed normative white male soldier. For relatively minor infractions, he was “dragged out of bed and across the floor” (Semple 2011) by commanders, pelted with rocks, and humiliated physically. He claimed in his journal that he was running out of comebacks for these attacks. And as the “weakest one left” (Gonnerman 2013, 4) in the masculine environment of the military, he felt the harassment would continue. Private Chen had enough. Distraught, he took his own life rather than continue to live in an environment of unabated harassment. He was nineteen years old.

Chen’s case is not unique. Recently, several other minority soldiers have committed suicide in response to feeling singled out and harassed on the basis of race (Gonnerman 2013). Similarly, a steady stream of women report that they may have more to fear from their fellow soldiers than from the enemy, as women service members are “180 times more likely to be a victim of sexual assault in the last year than to have died while deployed during the last 11 (O’Toole 2012). These patterns are illustrative of a set

of racialized and gendered understandings about service that my respondents claim are central to military life.

In this chapter, I claim that the organizational structure of the military—strict adherence to rank, a highly gendered and racialized division of labor, and the inability of soldiers to seek recourse for discrimination outside of the military justice system—creates a very specific “opportunity structure for discrimination” (Petersen & Saporta 2004). While scholars such as Larry Bobo (Bobo & Smith 1998) and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) claim that certain types of overtly derogatory race and gender talk have been delegitimized, the military context naturalizes these forms. This affective interpersonal discrimination will not be picked up in data on pay scales by rank, but it is nonetheless important in shaping the life of people of color and women. Indeed, research indicates “although the consequences of general harassment may not affect a victim in terms of shaping their objective work status...there is good reason to suspect that such discrimination holds quite significant sociopsychological consequences for its victims” (Roscigno 2007, 24). Second, I claim that, just as we saw with mental health in the previous chapter, military programs aimed at helping alleviate racial and gender

inequality can instead hurt soldiers who come forward with complaints. I argue that despite having affirmative action officers in every unit, mandatory diversity and sensitivity trainings, and generalized non-discrimination policies, racial and gender harassment are still as much a part of the military as the standard-issue M16. Research indicates that “internal workplace conditions affect both workers and regulatory agents’ interpretations of potentially discriminatory experiences” (Hirsh & Kornrich 2008). This is especially important in the military, as commanders have extreme discretionary power over employees who report discrimination. Further, as Joan Acker (2000) claims, organizational equity projects themselves only exist because they are countenanced by those with “long established authority” (626). These established authorities are unlikely to implement policies or procedures that fundamentally challenge hierarchies of race, class, or gender. Because complaints of discrimination undermine established authority and can potentially challenge organizational legitimacy, there is a contradiction built into these programs. This leaves those with the most to lose charged with the enforcement of procedures that undermine their own organizational power—a classic conflict of interest. As a result, “decoupling” (Meyer & Rowan 1977) between stated

organizational commitments to equality and the downplaying or denial of harassment is motivated by this contradiction. Because of this, Beilby (2000) argues, “close examination of internal practices often shows that the company’s EEO efforts to advance minorities and women through the organization contain more symbol than substance, with little impact on actual promotion policy or practice” (125). Building on this insight, I argue that military programs allow commanders and fellow soldiers to target those who come forward with claims of harassment, subjecting them to hazing, further harassment, or even expulsion from the military—ultimately reinforcing established authority. Although the military is an officially color-blind (Bonilla-Silva 2003) and allegedly gender-neutral organization, my research shows that the military has organizational mechanisms that allow some forms of racial and gender harassment to continue to occur and sometimes go unpunished. This is especially the case when reports of discrimination bump up against organizational needs, such as the need for bodies in battle.

## **5.2 Race in the Modern Military**

The military is considered by many scholars to be a model of positive race

relations. Since President Truman's 1948 executive order desegregating the armed forces, a stream of scholarly works has argued that the military is a strong meritocracy with zero tolerance for discrimination (Moskos 1966). Like policies that encouraged mental health treatment (see Chapter 3), outside pressures helped to force Truman's hand. The combination of "cold war" pressures, with the Soviet Union exploiting the U.S.' blatant racism for propaganda purposes and civil rights groups highlighting African Americans who had fought "for democracy" during World War II (Feagin 2000) but were subject to hatred at home, convinced a reluctant Truman that integration was necessary (Parker 2009). The desegregation of the military was the largest institutional effort toward racial inequality at that historical juncture. However, like many organizations that were forced through outside pressures to integrate, the military *retroactively coopted the language of equal opportunity and implemented policies aimed at lessening inequality*. Despite mainstream sociological works that tend to portray racial progress as one long American march towards racial redemption (Alba 2003), scholarship on race and the military often glosses over the fact that the implementation of desegregation, like current moves towards greater gender integration, was originally met with much hostility. "The Army

believed that since segregation was part of American life, it was part of the military establishment as well, and the Army should not be a laboratory for social experimentation” (Armor et al. 2009, 226). This language sounds strikingly like contemporary conservative critics who shun the idea of full gender integration, as they too argue that desegregation undermines the natural social order. As with subsequent movement towards integration in the wider society, commanders and enlisted men fought to keep units racially segregated, arguing that “unit cohesion” would be damaged. The result was that the military remained “integrated” in name but largely segregated in practice (Dansby et al. 2000). Despite Truman’s order, all black units were not outlawed until after the Korean War in 1954, partially in response to the fact that the military was not attracting enough white recruits (Armor 2009). Following these early issues, the military has long been criticized for black overrepresentation, as activists claim that recruiters prey on blacks who cannot find work in the discriminatory civilian labor market (Armor 2009).

Scholars have long argued that despite these problems, the military is perhaps the single most successful organization in the US at lessening racial inequality. Indeed,



sociologists Charles Moscos and John Butler (1996) go so far as to claim that the military “is the only place in American life where Whites are routinely bossed around by Blacks.” The U.S. military was a pioneer in using color-blind approaches to managing racial difference. Today, the military publicly argues that diversity contributes to force readiness and recruitment actively focuses on minorities. Yet research also uncovers considerable racial inequality that has yet to be explained. Blacks are still concentrated in the lower ranks, promoted at slower rates than their white counterparts, subject to harsher punishments, and have higher rates of PTSD following military stressors, including discrimination (Burk & Espinoza 2012). Because analyses of race and the military tend to adopt a simplistic view of race relations in the military (for example, asking whether they are better or worse than civilian life (Lundquist 2004; Teachman & Tedrow 2008), scholars may miss how the organizational arrangements that structure military life influence race relations. It is important that we understand the mechanisms that allow this contradictory situation—between goals of egalitarianism and continued inequality—to continue. Scholars of discrimination point to a number of mechanisms, including opportunity hoarding and exploitation (Tilly 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey et al.

2009) that can compound inequalities. However, much of the research on discrimination is concentrated on studies of the point of hire (Pager & Shepherd 2008), leaving us with little knowledge regarding how, for instance, organizational norms may foster micro-aggressions (Sue et al., 2008), or how allocative discrimination (Leicht 2008), in the form of slower promotions, worse duty, or networked access to resources may influence the lives of soldiers.

For women in the military, the evidence of discrimination is even more straightforward. Following their experiences in the war zone, female service members are experiencing higher rates of PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma<sup>1</sup> than males. Often this trauma is caused by assaults committed by their fellow soldiers. Recent estimates of MST among samples of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans indicated that between 30-45% of female veterans are subject to this trauma (Zinzow et al. 2007). Women who experience MST are nine times more likely to develop PTSD than other female veterans. Last year the Department of Defense claimed that nearly half of these traumas went unreported.

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<sup>1</sup> Military Sexual Trauma is any form of unwanted sexual contact, harassment, or advance experienced while in the military.

Finally, black women in the military are most likely to be concerned about the Equal Opportunity environment, and studies of other organizations show that women of color are most likely to be harassed (Rundblad 2001; Murrell 1996). Given these demographic realities, my analysis moves beyond gender comparisons by incorporating intersectional perspectives on military service, as intersectional perspectives can illuminate the multifaceted experience of differently situated soldiers.

Similar to the brief history presented above on racial integration into the military, women's incorporation and acceptance into the military has been slow and rife with problems. Rather than enlightened anti-sexism, worries about finding enough recruits pushed the services to open non-combat roles to women, following the conversion of the military to an all-volunteer force (Armor 1996). Further, conservative critics (Browne 2007) relying on outdated notions of gender essentialism continue to argue that the military, and combat particularly, is no place for women. They cite differences in physical size and psychological orientation to claim that women are biologically unsuited for combat and argue that these biological differences make comparisons to racial integration untenable (Browne 2007). As we will see below, many of my

respondents draw on these arguments to justify their personal objections to women in the military. Ironically, these arguments ignore the fact that the integration of blacks was opposed on the same grounds, that women in Iraq and Afghanistan have already been in combat. Some have performed as expected and others have failed to live up to expectations, just as have men. These arguments fail to recognize that combat is physically and psychologically dangerous for *anyone exposed to it, regardless of gender*; and that the military has spent millions of dollars socializing soldiers to overcome an aversion to killing (Barry 2011; Grossman 1995).

### **5.2.1 Theoretical background**

My research draws on several theories to refine our understanding of service during wartime and the military's response to discrimination. For instance, Bonilla-Silva's (2010) well-known "color-blind racism" model argues that overt expressions of racial prejudice and discrimination are now frowned upon and have been replaced by discourse that is apparently "non-racial" but nonetheless effective in structuring inequality. Bonilla-Silva claims that there are four central "frames" encoding color-blind racism—abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism and the minimization of

racism—and that these frames allow subjects to form a firm yet contingent ideological position justifying the current racial hierarchy (2010). As an effective ideology, this contingency allows those employing the frames to deal with unexpected “racial situations” (Hartigan 1999), with relatively coherent storylines that help to ensure white privilege. Part of the allure of these storylines is that their adherents eschew epithets or direct racial reference in explaining inequality; hence they appear reasonable and “non-racial.” Similarly, while the laissez-faire (Bobo and Smith 1998), aversive racism (Dovidio 2001), and symbolic racism (Sears 2003) traditions differ in their particulars, all argue that white racism is no longer reproduced through blunt, Jim Crow-style language and policy. Rather, these scholars argue that reversion to Nazism, anti-colonial movements, and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (Winant 2000), triggered a crisis for white supremacy” (Doane 2006, 258) leading to the adoption of “kinder, gentler” forms of racial exclusion. While I find this theoretical tradition extremely convincing, I argue that the operation of covert or overt racism is contextual. Ironically, many of these theories see the importance of changing racial attitudes over *time* (Schuman et al. 1997) and in historical context (Hall 1986) yet they *have little to say about how race and gender*

*relations will change contextually.* This omission replicates one of the mistakes critical race theorists attribute to quantitative scholars by implying, however unintentionally, that racial attitudes are consistent and adhere to individuals. "'Ideas about race need to be understood in relation to structures, institutional and cultural practices, and discourses, not simply as something which emanates from certain individual beings '" (Lewis 2004, 632).

The importance of understanding context when it comes to racial and gendered relations is implicit in much of the literature. For instance, Picca and Feagin's notion of "two-faced racism" (2007) relies on the idea that whites carefully censor themselves in public and reveal their "true" racism in private. While the evidence they present for this assertion is compelling, a more nuanced reading does not rely on an internal racist essence, but is "at least as much a property of settings as it is a property of individual opinions" (Eliasoph 1999, 486). Social psychologists (Dovidio 2001), linguists (Hill 2008), and careful comparative ethnographers (Eliasoph 1999; Hughey 2012) have chronicled the continuities and breaks in white racial discourse. As Bell and Hartman (2007) claim, most Americans see diversity as a "strength," but what this means practically is unclear.

These scholars argue that understandings of diversity are "fraught with tensions and contradictions" and that "many idealized conceptions simply don't square with the deeply problematic realities of difference as they are experienced in the concrete contexts of everyday social life" (Hartman and Bell 2007, 897). Although there are, of course, continuities in expressions of racial animus, "the expression of racial prejudice and intergroup bias more generally is sensitive to norms in the immediate social context" (Dovidio 830) than the dominant theories claim.

Similar to "locker room talk" among men, certain organizations have features, such as extreme gender segregation or a highly racialized division of labor, which may foster bad behavior. Despite this, the military actively frames equality as an institutional goal and has a strict moral contract, "pledging not to discriminate" (Burk 2012). Pointing to the history of desegregation, pay scales equalized by rank and seniority, rates of intra-racial marriage, and minorities' high rating of their quality of life (Moskos and Butler 1996; Lundquist 2004; 2008)), scholars argue that the military has lessened racial tensions to a level civilian agencies should envy. However, researchers have yet to examine how interactions between service members may reinforce racialized and gendered

boundaries. The whites and blacks in my sample tend to have very different interpretations of the social context of the military and its effects, as do the men and women regarding gender relations.

### **5.2.2 Gender in the Military**

Perhaps the prototypical “gendered organization” (Acker 1990), Acker’s classic article on the qualities of a gendered organization reads as if she were describing the military. Laying out the basic qualities of organizational practices that structure informal controls, Acker argues that gendered organizations actively disadvantage women by creating and enforcing segregation and status hierarchies, disseminating widely shared cultural beliefs, and reinforcing masculinity (1990). Although Acker’s more recent work attempts to bridge the historical divide between theories that examine racial and gender discrimination in isolation (Acker 2006), the same cannot be said for male scholars of race and ethnicity. However, as feminist scholars have pointed out over the last three decades, any comprehensive understanding of the nexus of oppression must take multiple social identities into account (Choo & Ferree 2010). To do this in the context of



the military, I draw on the concept of intersectionality (Collins 1995, Crenshaw 1991), which sees inequality as process driven and built on relational power within institutions. This is an especially relevant combination of theories for examining the military, as the rigid rank structure governs nearly every interaction, and rank is a class relationship. This is important for studies of inequality because the class-based stratification system in the military is transparent. Some scholars claim that the rank structure of the military has lessened racial tensions, arguing that “friction in the Army arises not so much between the races as between lower ranking soldiers and sergeants, between enlisted men and officers, between line units and staff units,” (Moskos and Butler 1996). Unfortunately, in practice, this becomes distinction without difference, as just as in most workplaces (Charles 2004; Huffman 2004), these are highly segregated areas of the service. Line units tend to be white, staff black. NCOs tend to be white and male, whereas blacks are overrepresented among sergeants. Gendered relationships are central to the organization (for instance, women largely occupy support roles, are still excluded from “official” combat despite the lifting of the combat ban, and the rank structure is highly stratified by gender). I claim that similar processes influence both

racial and gender discrimination with gender, race, and rank intersecting to disadvantage (or privilege) some groups of people. Unlike the research on race in the military, the research on gender sees the military as a highly gendered organization that can be quite harmful to women service members.

Another advantage of these theories of discrimination is that they move beyond the vast majority of studies that focus on exclusion largely before organizational incorporation. While important, these studies may miss “differential treatment once employed or once housed, where the outcome is status hierarchy maintenance.” (Roscigno 2007, 10). Diversity is reflected in the military’s recruitment numbers for women and minorities, but this tells us little about how the organizational environment shapes interaction.

I argue that formal policies aiming for equality are “decoupled” from the actual practices of military commanders. As I showed in the last chapter, backstage procedures do not necessarily conform to front stage policies. When these policies interact with routine practices of racial and gender discrimination, they put targets of discrimination at a disadvantage. This is a useful theoretical addition because although color-blind and

intersectional theories are compelling, they both lack an explanation of the specific mechanisms that reproduce racial and gender inequality.

### **5.3 The Military Needs Bodies**

Soldiers in my sample recognized the contradictory way in which race and gender were incorporated into the military. Integration is utilitarian and not driven by the benevolence that the military often claims. For instance, when I asked Zach, a 33-year-old white male, about equality in the military, he said,

The bottom line is the military needs bodies...it does not preclude prejudice and phobia...We'd love to have you even though I might hate you...I think it's more a factor of the need for bodies, black or white, male or female, that has a kind of troubling power that has made it egalitarian, but I wouldn't give it credit for its egalitarian nature...the military just needs bodies, as did plantations, it just wasn't taking white bodies by and large. As for gender, slavery was kind of egalitarian in nature...black men and women were both slaves. I think the need drives it, 'we need people in the infantry. Women will do it? Ok, then fuck it, send them to the grinder too.'

Zach's response highlights a central paradox of the military's approach to race and gender. Zach felt the military did not live up to its stated promise of racial and gender equality. Reminiscent of Dr. King's observation on American violence that frames this

chapter, Zach's comment shows that continued prejudice can be compatible with policies that seem egalitarian, such as desegregation or opening up combat roles to women. These policies serve larger military goals, and racial or gender equality may be an organizationally unimportant byproduct. Zach also compares the military to a plantation, calling our attention to the importance of understanding *organizational context* in analyses of racial and gender discrimination (Eliasoph 1999, Hirsch & Kornrich 2008). What Dr. King called a "brutal solidarity" highlighted that context matters in assessing racial inequality. Indeed, people of color can be incorporated into and individually benefit from organizational arrangements that prop up racial inequality, just as women can act as "social men" (Acker 1990), ultimately supporting social systems that harm women. In fact, the most effective systems of social control have always relied on legitimacy gained through the consent of the governed for their power (Gramsci 1971). Scholars have long recognized that organizationally specific factors (i.e., the nature of work or the steepness of a hierarchy) influence the form and manifestation of inequality (Acker 1990). Despite this, too often our theories of racial and gender discrimination do not take organizationally specific factors into account.

Dominant theories tend to see racism and sexism as attitudes or ideological constants, rather than as contextual variables.

### **5.3.1 Dealing with Discrimination**

In order to “manage diversity” within the military, every unit has an Equal Opportunity representative. This representative is charged with evaluating claims of discrimination and fostering an environment of inclusiveness (Moskos 1997, Jenkins 2012). Many of my respondents pointed to these Equal Opportunity representatives’ presence in every unit as an example of efforts to quell discrimination. One respondent even served in this position. However, when asked what happens to service members who access these program representatives, my respondents suggested that the rest of the unit would ostracize them. For instance, Chuck, a white man in his early 30s, vacillated about his understanding of race in the military. Like many of my other white respondents, he claimed that there was very little discrimination and said that equal opportunity officers were available to field complaints. However, he also showed what would happen to those who accessed this program. He said:

I would definitely say if you’re a minority, and let’s say you’re in a company of maybe a hundred and twenty people large and there is

maybe 5 or six minorities, if you report it, you've got the majority against you already. Cause like let's say you're in a platoon and you're the only black guy and you feel you're discriminated [against] and you go file the report. Right away guys are going to be wary. They're not going to want to be around you—they are going to be wary about saying anything around you that might be offensive. So they're just going to ostracize you, and you're going to be, like, here's everybody—you're that guy over there.

Chuck clearly understood that those who access programs aimed at dealing with discrimination make themselves targets. This was an interesting moment in the interview, because he had just finished telling me that there was no discrimination in the military and things were “all equal.” This quote also outlines the process of punitive empathy quite well. Chuck was aware that someone may be discriminated against and that there was a formal procedure for dealing with this. However, once that formal procedure is accessed, things only get worse for the target. This shows how formal reporting procedures can serve to legitimate the process while stigmatizing the individual (Light et al. 2011). It also shows that the reporting process itself serves to discipline soldiers into accepting harassment, as they may know that what happens after reporting is worse. Further, those serving in the role of EO Officer often report that those of higher rank resist claims of discrimination, and that support for the EO proceedings

can be “a thin veneer of acceptance as opposed to a deep rooted commitment” (Jenkins 2012), as formal compliance to an organizational procedure does not necessarily produce an equitable outcome.

Further, a generalized environment of racial hostility does not necessarily give one grounds for formal charges. As critical race theorists have pointed out, the notions of intent and harm that are central to western jurisprudence in proving discrimination can allow for other forms of exclusion that do not meet a legal standard for complaint but can be debilitating nonetheless (Delgado and Stefancic 2000). For instance, when I asked Angela, a black woman who claimed to challenge some of the entrenched hierarchies in the military by trying to organize other women, about her experiences with race and racism in the military, she had this to say:

It was just this kind of demonizing of the brown people...and maybe inadvertently it happens, but it didn't feel inadvertent. It felt blatant and purposeful...you have to identify the enemy and it wasn't just about identifying Afghans or Iraqis as enemy. It was the general classification of brown people as enemy...you would have soldiers who would say things so offensive about blacks or Hispanics or even Iraqis or Afghans that was so racist and so offensive but then they'd say, 'you know I don't feel that way about you, we're in the same unit, we're wearing the same uniform, but those other ones that don't wear the uniform like you, they're this and they're that.'

Black and brown people are demonized, in Angela's experience, and some soldiers considered people of color in uniform to be "exceptions." Angela went on to say that her commanding officer proudly displayed a confederate flag in his office, but that she found reporting this kind of thing to be pointless. In contrast to the color-blind thesis that argues that the "dominant" (Bonilla-Silva 2006) form of racial talk in the post-Civil Rights era avoids direct racial reference, Angela's experiences with racial hostility were open, direct, and disturbing to her. Further, because of the rank structure of the military, she claims she had little recourse when dealing with this open hostility. Although this generalized hostility may not have allowed for a formal complaint, this hardly matters, because there is a backlog of equal opportunity complaints and sufficient problems with reporting procedures to "keep members from filing complaints" (Burk and Espinoza 2012, 410, GAO 1996 2008). This is especially disturbing given that the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in 1983 (*Chappell v. Wallace*) that enlisted soldiers cannot sue the military for discrimination, as (according to them) adequate internal channels exist to address discrimination (Burk 2012). This case was brought by five Navy men who alleged "a pattern of behavior in which, [commanding officers] failed to assign them



desirable duties, threatened them, gave them low performance evaluations, and imposed penalties of unusual severity” (Chappell v. Wallace 1983) because of their race. These charges were reviewed by the military justice system and revoked (a pattern seen repeatedly among a large number of sexual assault cases). Despite this revocation by the military justice system, the court held that indeed, the constitutional rights of these black Navy men might have been violated. Although this finding seems specific to the military, organizational scholars increasingly argue that U.S. courts see diversity programs themselves, regardless of long-term outcomes, as good-faith efforts aimed at reducing organizational inequality (Dobbin 2009). Organizations become hermetically sealed from equal opportunity complaints, as internal mechanisms are taken at face value as representing efforts to reduce discrimination.

### **5.3.2 White reactions to the military racial environment**

My white respondents tended to have a different take from my black respondents on race talk in the military. Mirroring the findings of many scholars of whiteness studies, many of my male respondents recognized that they may not see racism or its effects because of their whiteness. William took a lot of joy in being able to call a fellow soldier

the “N” word. He said,

A black guy, that I used to work with, (laughs) we would call each other n-----s, but he was cool with it. Like, you could call him a n-----r as long as you weren’t serious, you know? It had to be at certain times, you know? It was just us in a real close-knit setting and we were making jokes...and be like, (laughs), “Crazy n-----s!” There’s the serious racism for people who do it to be mean, and to be hateful, and generally feel that way about people...and then there is the way we did it, where we kind of – we would be racist, but it would be more of a like a family type way.

The color-blind model argues that this type of speech has been highly stigmatized in the post-civil rights era, and indeed, William indicates that it was only appropriate in certain contexts. However, he also claims that the very invocation of this unquestionably racist language is what makes it not racist, by “taking away the power of the racism.” The respondent feels that he is so far beyond the possibility of exhibiting racial prejudice that indulging in such speech is normal (although I’m not sure I’d want to be a part of the family he invokes in his “family type way” of talking about racism). Further, as Embrick and Henricks (2013) argue in their recent paper on racial slurs, there is no historical or current equivalency in “outcome or meaning” between racial slurs directed at minority populations and those directed at whites. Indeed, they claim that this “false parallel” argument fails to account for the weight of historical oppression that accompanies

epithets directed at people of color. In comparison, slurs aimed at whites are relatively benign. Further, they claim slurs aimed at people of color continue to have material and symbolic implications for racial inequality. White soldiers I interviewed claimed that the ability to use this language freely for the first time indicated an absence of racial tension that they had felt in other contexts. Several of the white respondents said that since returning to civilian life, they missed being able to talk this way. This type of discourse without sanction represents a white reclamation of pre-Civil Rights Era prerogative without the tenets of political correctness.

For instance, Carson also thought that the racist joking the men in his unit engaged in was harmless:

Victor: Do you think the military's efforts regarding race has been successful?

Carson: Oh, yeah.

Victor: Yeah? How so?

Carson: I mean, it's not racist. I mean, people - you don't go up in the career just because you're white. You don't go down in career just because you're black. It doesn't matter who the hell you are. I mean, there's first sergeant black people and there's fucking sergeant majors that are black.

Victor: Yep.

Carson: I mean, there's no racial inequality at all.

Victor: Okay.

Carson: I don't see it. There might be joking around, but even the person that you're joking around with knows it and jokes back. I mean, especially in the 11 Bravo world, that's just what we do. We fuck with each other.

Victor: Okay.

Carson: So, you may hear racial stuff, but it's more of a, 'Wow, that was pretty funny.'

Victor: Okay.

Carson: Everybody's laughing. It's not like, "Let's go hang this kid." Or you know what I'm saying? That's not—fuck, no.

Victor: Okay...

In line with Bonilla-Silva's color-blind model, Carson engages in the "minimization of racism" by claiming that there was no visible racial inequality. Further, because a few blacks have achieved a relatively high level of enlisted rank, he claims that they have not experienced racism. At the same time, Carson claims that the racial stuff was "pretty funny" and all involved were on board. He also makes a strange cognitive leap, from "Everybody's laughing" to "Let's go hang that kid." This implies an understanding of racism that is grounded in physical violence against people of color, ignoring the many systematic ways blacks are dehumanized, including through jokes. Carson also failed to acknowledge the extreme racial segregation of his unit when discussing these jokes. When I asked about how integrated his unit was, he said "very". But when I asked a

follow-up question about his unit, he corrected himself and said that there was, “like, one black dude.” This level of integration would make it very difficult for that person to speak up for themselves, as research shows tokenization can lead people to strategic silence as a means of emotional control (Wingfield 2010b).

Disturbingly, in the sentence following his cognitive leap from joking to hanging, Carson showed how notions of masculinity and heteronormativity can be enforced through violence.

Carson: Maybe gays. That’s a whole other one, man. That’s a whole other ballgame.

Victor: How so?

Carson: All right, dude. Eleven Bravos. Do you know how many times I’ve spooned with a guy because it’s fucking freezing outside, didn’t have a goddamn blanket. You got to cuddle with that dude. Do you know how many times I’ve showered in open showers with men for months and months and months? Now, you’re telling me that I’m going to take a shower and there’s a gay guy in there and he’s straight staring at my junk while I’m completely naked. You don’t think I’m going to have a problem with that? I’ll probably beat his ass. And what’s going to happen after that? That’s a hate crime. I just beat the shit of a dude because he was gay. No, I just beat the shit out of a dude because he was staring at my private parts. You know what I’m saying?

Carson sees violence as a viable (albeit illegal) response to homosexuality in the military.

Citing a host of tropes used to denigrate gays, he constructs the spooning and open

showers of the military as heteronormative activities. He also relies on the faulty assumption that gay men would be attracted to him and unable to control their urges. He ignores the fact while he was in the military; he likely served with closeted gay men. This is an acceptable form of discrimination to Carson, unlike the racial discrimination that he claims is absent in the military.

Ironically, in their tome to military equality, Moskos and Butler (1996) recognize that race talk in the military is highly offensive and discriminatory. They recount the story of a Black enlisted soldier incredulous that he overheard white fellow soldiers talking about “niggers” in the enlisted club. Although Moskos and Butler recognize this issue, they claim that it is not a problem, arguing that as long as it doesn’t affect military discipline, there is no problem. The military sees “good race relations as a means to readiness and combat effectiveness—not as an end in itself” (53). By this logic, racially charged language is permissible as long as blacks don’t respond hostilely: to do so would be breaching the peace and undermining combat effectiveness.

#### **5.4 Gendered Harassment in the Military**

A similar dynamic is true for gender as well. Recently, the Pentagon’s press

secretary claimed there is “no tolerance” for sexual harassment or assault in the military. This claim is belied by the environment of casual misogyny reported by many of the service members I spoke with. Men I interviewed recognize that soldiers are sometimes casually insubordinate to women commanders, subtly undermining their command and chances for promotion. And women claim that they are not only fearful of sexual harassment and assault but, as with racial discrimination, fear they will be punished for reporting.

Every woman in my sample reported some form of gendered harassment. In fact, one black woman who claimed that she was “thick skinned” so she didn’t notice racial harassment said, “if there is any discrimination in the Marine Corps, it’s gender based.” Angela’s observation on the topic helps to capture the intersectional nature this harassment can take. She said,

And then there is the sexual harassment, which is just disgusting. The very first night I was at Advanced Individual Training I was propositioned for sex...I don’t know if he was a staff sergeant or a master sergeant...He was up there in rank. I was afraid to say no (I did), but I was afraid because of his rank. It’s intimidating because you are in basic training and everything is about rank, rank, rank, rank. He was just so, I know this is your first night here, what do you want to do kind of thing? And then he just flat out asked for it. You try to just laugh it off at

first...and he's still right there in your face with that funky ass breath just being disrespectful. I honestly didn't feel like I had the right to say no." Consistent with intersectional theories (Moore 2012) that claim multiple stigmatized identities can compound discrimination, Angela's gender made her a target and her rank made her feel like she needed to give in. Because of the military's socialization process, she was afraid of the consequences of denying his advances. Basic training instills the need to follow orders, and is very clear that repercussions can follow if this is programming is disobeyed (Holyfield 2011). Class and gender combined, deepening disadvantage, just as they may combine to advantage men, who are much less likely to be subject to this form of harassment (SWAN 2013).

Kara, a white woman marine who served one tour in Iraq, also complained of harassment related to her rank and sex. She claimed that,

Sexual discrimination, I had a little bit of it...But it actually boiled down to my staff sergeant while I was over in Iraq he um...I had lost a lot of weight because I'd been sick. And he's like sitting back doing the...um...[sucks teeth leeringly] Kara, you've been losing a lot of weight, and then like a few months later and he did the same exact thing. It was just like that really creepy, you know, you're not supposed to be doing that. This was my staff sergeant. [Also] I had when I was like, brand new into the fleet into Jacksonville, it's very, there is like a game basically, where they're like Ohhh...fresh meat, and they try and get to you, sleep with you and stuff like that.



Like Angela, Kara felt that her rank and gender left her open to discrimination by a superior. The military's weight regulations were used as an excuse for her staff sergeant to examine her body in a way that went well beyond the required protocol. Multiple times her commanding officer approached her with a legitimate military concern (physical readiness) through a sexualized lens. As she notes, "you're not supposed to be doing that" when in a position of command. Further, she recounts the generalized sexism of the environment by claiming that fellow Marines saw her as a piece of "meat" and had a contest to see who could sleep with her first. Later in our conversation, Kara also recounted a story showing the unequal justice surrounding these cases. A Staff Sergeant was having inappropriate relations with several of his subordinates. She recounts, "the thing that really sucked, once you're higher up in the food chain basically, the harder it is to get them in trouble. They get a slap on the wrist it seems, and then the lance corporals get NJP'ed [Non-Judicial Punishment] cause she got bumped down to a Private First Class." Whereas the staff sergeant was reprimanded, his punishment was not as harsh as that of his female subordinate, despite his multiple infractions. Further, Kara said that this person was charged again a few months later, and allowed to retire

with his prior rank's pension. This is in line with the recent case of General Sinclair, who was allowed to retire at a reduced rank despite being guilty of sex crimes with subordinates and being accused of forced sex (Oppel 2014). These cases reinforce the culture of impunity surrounding rank and sexual abuses in the military, while reminding low-ranking soldiers of the perils of challenging those in power, as the military shows that they ultimately have more to lose. Kara's experiences remind us that "militarizing women always has been pursued for the sake of controlling women in ways that maintain the sorts of masculinity that enhance militarism" (Enloe 2000, 271). In all the examples Kara recounts, women were subordinate to militarized masculinity.

Other respondents confirmed that women service members may be seen through a highly sexualized lens. For instance, Dylan spoke in extremely derogatory terms by sharing an alternative acronym for women marines (WM): "women marines, walking mattresses." Upon further investigation, I found entire website threads dedicated to this sexist acronym for Women Marine, with writers claiming to be marines justifying why they see their fellow service members this way. Dylan saw my shocked face when he

said this,<sup>2</sup> and he proceeded to claim that he was just joking and not all of the women marines were engaged in this behavior, but he knew for a fact that some were. Dylan went on to tell me that he was unhappy that women were promoted before him and believed this was because they had provided sexual favors. This is a pervasive rumor among enlisted men in the military, further subverting gender equality. The Department of Defense recognizes this problem, and its most recent survey on sexual assault had several questions dealing with the pervasive idea that women are promoted for sexual favors.

Nicole had a different take on what Dylan considered to be only joking. She described the environment of both sexual and racial harassment in the military as simply part of the atmosphere. When I asked her if she had ever witnessed any discrimination, she lowered her voice and replied..."oh yes." Her response takes up several transcript pages, which she begins by saying,

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<sup>2</sup> There is a methodological lesson for fieldworkers in my response to this quote during the interview. For fieldworkers, it is important to control our emotional responses when research subjects say things we may find reprehensible (Kleinman 1993), as we don't want to disrupt the flow of important data our respondents are sharing.

You hear racial discrimination, you hear racial slurs every day, there is definitely a lot of sexual things that happen, I mean, I don't even know how to describe it. We have what's called "equal opportunity" and a lot of people make jokes there like, "man, if these people" [opportunity officers] ever came down to our workplaces, we'd all be fired."

Nicole's response shows that despite the military's efforts, negative racialized and gendered comments are pervasive. Further, the equal opportunity efforts themselves are part of the joke. One of my respondents who was in charge of diversity trainings, claimed that soldiers regularly laughed through the trainings. Nicole's observations on these jokes take on the aura of the lay sociologist when she questions whether this humor is truly benign. She says, "sometimes the jokes are so much you have to ask, what are you really trying to say?" She felt that the jokes were a thinly veiled reflection of an underlying sexist ideology. This understanding is in line with the analysis of humor recently put forth by Christina Sue and Tanya Golash-Boza (2013) that claims this type of humor reinforces social boundaries, legitimates hierarchies, and provides tellers with a sense of superiority. Nicole had strong reason to question the benevolence of these joke tellers, as two of them broke into her apartment one night after she showered and attempted to assault her. They were heavily intoxicated and she was able to fight them off, but Nicole didn't report the initial attempted assault, and they assaulted

another woman the same night.

#### **5.4.1 Using the “Proper Channels”**

There are good reasons that my respondents don’t report assaults. One good reason comes from Hillary, a 34-year-old black single mother of two who decided to reenlist after her first deployment because her job at McDonald’s neither used the mechanic skills she acquired in the military nor paid enough to cover her bills. She describes her fear of sexual assault while being deployed and the inadequate institutional response to the problem. So, she and a fellow woman soldier felt that in order to protect themselves from the assaults that were happening “probably...at least once a week,” they had to take matters into their own hands.

Hillary: We used to take our weapons in the shower and our rounds. And we could’ve actually got in trouble. We put our round in the weapon and let it be cocked.

Victor: But these are your fellow soldiers?

Hillary: Yeah! Mm-hmm. And? Most of the time it was the fellow soldiers. And they—all they would do is get rank taken away and they would get pay taken away. And you would be labeled as the person who you know, does stuff like that, but—nothing don’t really happen to them.

This quote shows just how inadequate some of my women respondents felt the military was when it came to protecting them from sexual advances. Further, it shows how

pervasive the fear of sexual assault is on some forward operating bases. According to Hillary, this is a problem the military is clearly aware of, but she feels trying to deal with it through “proper” structures is ineffectual. I asked what happened once rank was taken away from perpetrators, and she said they usually get their status back within a year.

Another example of the consequences of reporting comes from Malik, a black sergeant who had done a single tour. He was describing the application of military justice when a chief was accused and found guilty of sexual harassment. Malik was one of the soldiers who corroborated the story of the woman who came forward. He said,

When they came down to investigate, they relieved this supervisor of mine of duty because all the people, all the people came around with sexual harassment, everything. They relieved him of duty. But, guess what happened? They brought him back up and said, “nobody else can do this job” and mind you, this is the fucking army. If you die they replace you in a heartbeat.

Malik saw this situation as representative of the futility of reporting harassment. Malik also felt, although he couldn’t prove, that he was later retaliated against by this supervisor, in the form of missed promotion. This type of retaliation could have a chilling effect on Malik’s coming forward with complaints or corroborations in the

future. Malik's story also highlights how the military's commitment to the mission undermines policies aimed at lessening inequality.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

The military sees diversity as a "force multiplier" and claims it has zero tolerance for racial and gender harassment. My respondents, however, tell a more nuanced story that sees the programs aimed at dealing with the problems of racial and gender harassment as secondary to the military's mission. Indeed, "inequalities that exist in U.S. society are often reproduced in the U.S. armed services" (Widdance-Twine 2013). Respondents recognize the coexistence of an integrated military with continued discrimination. Further, this work undermines theories of race and gender that argue that overt blunt expressions of animosity have been undermined. I argue, that rather, they have become situationally contingent, and the military is one organizational domain where these behaviors can progress relatively unchallenged. Further, although whites and some people of color claim that this type of interaction is relatively harmless, a large body of research shows that there are affective consequences of this type of racist

and sexist talk, as the targets show increased anxiety (Barreto & Ellemers 2005, D.W. Sue et al. 2007).

In the next chapter, I continue to examine how decoupling influences life in the military. I examine military families and show that, just as we have seen in the cases of mental health and discrimination, policies that promote strong families are secondary to the military mission.



## 6. The Army Didn't Issue You a Wife

### 6.1 Chapter Preface

When I met Sgt. Phillip at our agreed-upon spot, I knew who he was right away. Stereotypically Army, he stood ramrod straight and looked crisp in his camouflage. A black man in his late 20's currently in the reserves, he had already finished one deployment to Iraq. I approached him to introduce myself, and as we were shaking hands, he said, "Maybe you want to interview my wife too, she knows more about what this war did to me than I do." I was struck by the sadness in his voice as he spoke, and as the interview progressed, he told me more of his story. His daughter was born while he was deployed, and he met her for the first time when she was seven months old. He claimed that missing her birth because of deployment was "the biggest regret of his life." His relationship with his fiancé changed dramatically once he was home. However, she was afraid to tell him directly, fearing that it would lead to an angry outburst. As a result,

when we went to talk to our father [the priest] my fiancé just broke down and started explaining things, that I get mad easily, I get frustrated, I yell at her, you know, and it was a reality check for me... That was about three months after I been back. So, when she broke down like that, I had to talk to the, to the father about four different times, you know, kind of like a counselor."

Sgt. Phillip recognized that the military had counselors in place to help with this type of

issue, but he feared that his family issues would not be kept confidential. He said, "They can tell you it's confidential, but I promise you, they know everything." This knowledge could be used against him when it came time for promotions. Further, he felt that the military's commitment to family life was insincere, or at least secondary to the larger mission of the war.

Sgt. Phillip: They don't give a damn about your family. If they're taking care of your family, you better believe it would be on CNN.

Victor: What does that mean? It'll be on CNN?

Sgt. Phillip: That means it's publicity. You know, they got some program that's actually trying, but, if it has to do with *your family* or the mission, it's the mission first.

Sgt. Phillip's understanding of how military life affected families was shared by nearly all of my respondents. Similar to its programs surrounding mental health treatment and anti-discrimination, the military has programs specifically aimed at promoting family life. Indeed, in her book on women's relationships with weapons throughout U.S. history, Winddance Twine (2013) argues that these programs make raising a family in the military more secure economically than comparable civilians, especially for women of color. Citing the basic housing allowance, subsidized food on base, education benefits for service members and dependents, and subsidized childcare, Winndance Twine

(2013) argues that these substantial benefits can help entice those with only a high-school degree to join the military, as very few jobs provide this level of support. While I agree with Twine that these are significant benefits relative to civilian employment, I argue that the rigors of military training and wartime deployments often undermine the benefits of these programs.

## **6.2. Chapter Outline**

In this chapter, I examine how military life during wartime affects family relations. I begin by examining the literature on deployments and their effects on family life, which shows that there are considerable psychological strains on non-deployed family members (McFarlane 2009). I argue that programs designed to encourage family are undermined by deployments. Although popular representations of homecoming tend to glamorize the return, with patriotic banners waving and happy families lovingly embracing the prodigal hero, the actual process of returning to family life is considerably more complex. Roles are renegotiated as responsibilities that were often carried out by the nonmilitary partner are shared (Tanielian 2008). If there are young children in the family, sometimes they are meeting the missing parent for the first time

after a deployment, and rules surrounding discipline and behavior need to be established. For reservists or those not living near a military base, they may be returning to a wider community that lacks strong social support. Finally, veterans with physical or psychological injuries present special challenges when returning to family life, as few families are prepared to deal with the profound difficulties that accompany these changes (Cozza et al. 2005). I extend my critique of the military as a gendered organization by arguing that the military families are as an “externality” that is actually central to the military’s ability to function. The military relies on family on the “home front” to fulfill many responsibilities that a soldier in the field cannot. In practice, it is often women fulfilling these roles.

### **6.1.2 The Challenges of Military Family Life**

In her classic article on military families, Mady Segal (1986) argues that both the military and the family are “greedy institutions” whose demands will increasingly come into conflict with one another. Segal points out that the military’s organizational requirements surrounding demands placed on the individual are non-negotiable, and argues that the military stresses the family largely indirectly, through soldiers. Further,

the military places a unique constellation of demands upon service members, including long separations from family, high levels of geographic mobility, the risk of injury or death, and a set of behavioral constraints not often combined in civilian organizations. These demands cause a conflict of allegiance (Segal 1996, 12) between the military and families, as both institutions vie for the time and energy of service members. Segal notes that this is an especially intense conflict for military women, as family life has historically and presently demanded their greater domestic involvement.

Recent research on military families shows that Segal's arguments were in some ways prescient. Unfortunately, much of this research is psychological in nature, and as such is grounded in mostly individualist interpretations of family dysfunction. This limits our understanding of the complex ways that the structure of the military as an organization may contribute to many problems interpreted as personal. However, evidence from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts shows that the demands stemming from deployments have a strong impact on families. Much of this research focuses on the mental health of the partners and children left behind, as fears of safety for the deployed soldier and changes in family routines increase stresses. Scholars have found

that mothers with a deployed partner are at greater risk for a number of disorders, including depression, anxiety, sleeping disorders, and acute stress (Mansfield et al. 2010). Importantly, this finding has implications for children, as parental stress is the largest predictor of whether children will develop psychological issues surrounding deployments (White et al. 2011). Further, deployment itself lowers marital satisfaction (de Bergh et al. 2011), as partners may find it hard to separate the military command from the partner's "choice" to deploy or have a deployment extended. If a spouse is deployed during a critical period such as pregnancy, there is "almost a three-fold increase in the risk of post-partum depression" (de Burgh et al. 2011). As with incidences of mental health disorders among soldiers, the pace of deployments during these wars has also influenced spouses. These effects also reverberate through the lives of children of deployed soldiers. Rates of child maltreatment in military populations are generally lower than those of civilians during peacetime. However, research during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts has found that maltreatment and neglect more than doubled during combat deployments, ultimately surpassing civilian rates (Cheppard et al. 2010). This finding shows how profoundly deployments can strain the coping resources of the

family member on the home front.

Although there is not much research on the effects of deployment on children, the published results we have thus far are disturbing. Results vary depending on developmental age and the psychological condition of the caregiver. For instance, young children left behind have also shown a larger increase in a number of maladaptive behaviors. In a sample of children under 5, Chartrand and colleagues (2008) found that those aged 1 ½ to 3 showed increased depression, even controlling for the depressive state of the caregiver. Further, those older than three were more likely to have externalizing symptoms, including discipline problems and crying. During peacetime, military children do not have higher baseline levels of these disorders when compared to the civilian population. This is important, given that nearly 40% of military children are under 5 (Chartrand et al. 2008). Older children have also been shown to exhibit behavioral problems related to parental deployment. Focusing on the ambiguity surrounding deployments, Hubener and colleagues (2007) drew on focus groups with adolescents to examine how they were adjusting to parental absence. They found that although these children exhibited resiliency, they also exhibited feelings of uncertainty,

stress, and symptoms consistent with depression. These scholars drew on the theory of ambiguous loss (Boss 2006), to explain their findings, arguing that the process of deployment and homecoming creates a situation in which the service member may be emotionally present but physically absent when deployed, or physically present and emotionally absent upon return. This ambiguity can create considerable uncertainty for adolescents. Taken together, the findings surrounding the deleterious influence of deployments on the entire family led one researcher to conclude, “there is no such thing as an injured service member. We should be thinking ‘injured family’” (quoted in Lamberg 2008, 644). Although my data do not include information on children directly, as we see below, some parents did report emotional absence that they felt was damaging to their family relationships when they returned home.

### **6.3 The contradiction between family promotion and policy**

Many of my respondents recognized the contradiction that Sgt. Phillip pointed out between the military’s stated support for family and the military’s demands on soldiers. For instance, when I asked Joe, a black single father of two, what he thought about the military family promotion policies, he said.



Joe: I actually *had* somebody say to me, a senior ranking officer, say to me, 'The Army didn't issue you a wife.'"

Victor: Wait a minute. Meaning that that's not their problem?

Joe: Right. When I was talking to him about one of my soldiers having some family problems, he was explaining to me that the, the Army didn't issue you a wife. So, you know, he can fix that however he wants to. Then, I had another officer tell me...I was having some trouble with one of my kids being sick, (laughs) he said to me, 'Um, well, maybe you want to resign and get out of the Army.' So, all that stuff about family and all that kind of stuff, whatever, 'All right. Whatever.'

When Joe tried to help soldiers with family problems, the officer he approached was unmoved. Further, the officer's response to his own difficulties indicated that Joe needed to make a choice between his family responsibilities and his military career. According to this logic, family life and military commitments were a zero-sum proposition. This was not the only time Joe was forced to deal with this type of choice. When he was being deployed to Afghanistan for a special ops mission, he had to conceal his location from his family. As a result, he did not communicate with his children for the entire tour. When I asked how he dealt with this situation, he told me his parents took care of his children. He granted them "power of attorney" and "hoped everything went fine."

Because of these types of demands, Joe blamed the military directly for one of his divorces.

Similarly, Peter, a white man in his late 20s, gives an example of how the proclamations of caring about family life don't always live up to the reality of military training. He recounts a story of how this conflict influenced his life:

This was at before my last deployment, before we went to Camp Viper, the battalion commander held a big, um, meeting for all the wives in the battalion. 'You know, hey, if your husbands have, if they have anything going on before deployment like hospitalizations, if like, you have kids being born, like family emergencies, stuff like that, no questions asked, we'll pull your husband out only for that day, you're not going to get any extra time, but we'll let him go just to go to that, or be there for the family, and then he can come straight back.' And, like, sat there and told all the families this, like, 'Don't worry. Call us up. We'll make sure this all happens.' So he lets the wives go. We go to work the next day, and we had had a doctor's appointment scheduled to do the 3-D ultrasound, and she was having a high risk pregnancy – and do blood tests from both of us to determine if the baby was going to have any problems and also find out the sex. It was like, a triple appointment in one. And so, I told him about stuff, and they're like, "You should have scheduled this some other time. Marine Corps is more important than your family....And my one first sergeant's like, 'Well, you know what? I missed my kid's birth, 'cause I was in Iraq. So how 'bout that? So how 'bout you just suck it up and deal with it?' I'm like, 'But you – the BC just told my wife yesterday that I was going to be able to go to it,' ...Yeah. It's just the thing – a face they put on to look good.

A single day after the battalion commander told a group of soon-to-deploy soldiers that they would have the time to deal with serious family issues surrounding the health of his pregnant wife and unborn son, the commander reneged on this promise. Peter was told that family was a subordinate structure to the needs of the military, and a sergeant downplayed the importance of missing the prenatal screening. Further, the responsibilities of childcare were passed onto the mother, a gendering act of the military relying on women for homemaking. This was a common theme in my data, as most of the men in heterosexual relationships expected their partner to assume this role. Peter also claimed that the military programs were “a face they put on to look good” but lacked the substantive commitments that military families needed to stay strong. He claimed, “They really don’t give a rat’s ass about family; I promise you that.” When I asked why the military claimed it promoted these programs if they weren’t committed to them, he said it was to look good for “the public.” As with mental health issues and diversity, the public front of care for the family, while perhaps sincere, is in practice not as important as the mission. Sadly, Peter also missed the birth of his child since he was fighting in Afghanistan when his son was born.

## 6.4 Difficulty Relating and Ambiguous Presence

A number of scholars have argued that deployment should be conceptualized under the family science theory of “ambiguous loss” (Boss 2006). As discussed above, Huebner and colleagues (2007) apply this notion when analyzing adolescents dealing with the cycle of deployment. They argue that the perceptions of uncertainty and loss, boundary ambivalence, change in mental health, and relational conflict made adolescents more likely to have emotional outbursts and act out. While this work is revealing, it does not show how this type of ambiguity and conflict surrounding roles influences soldiers. My respondents indicate that their ambiguous presence in the home was personally disturbing.

For instance, when Peter returned home after his second deployment, his son had been born. However, his long absence from the home complicated his relationship with his son.

When I first got home, he, like, gave me a big hug and wanted me and stuff, but then he was *so* attached to *her*, and I was kind of like the stranger in the house, that he didn't really want me there. And that went on for like – I was only home for, like, a month. But for that whole month, it was *extremely* hard to like, get that connection with him, that bond with him, because all he wanted was mom, 'cause that's all that's ever been

around. It was, but it was *really, really* hard to try and every day, keep trying and trying to build that connection. And there were so many times where I had just kind of given up. I was like, 'Shit. I don't know what else to do. My-my own son just doesn't even want me.'"

Peter's return highlights the uncertainty young children can have around the return of a parent. He expected to slide easily into the role of parent, and was heartened by his son's early attention. Nevertheless, as with the adolescents in Huebner's sample (2007), returning to the role was fraught because of the necessary changes surrounding childcare during his absence. Peter did eventually build a connection with his son, with his wife's constant encouragement. However, an altercation with the police led to a court order for his son to be removed from the house, because, as Peter put it, "I'm a danger to my family now." At the time of our interview, the son had been in foster care for four months. This may lead to a whole host of attachment issues that may continue to affect the long-term health of this military family.

Ambiguous presence was also manifest among soldiers suffering from mental health issues as they and their families struggled to understand and accept psychological changes (Faber et al. 2008). For instance, Joel was suffering from PTSD and, as is symptomatic of the disorder, he regularly had the desire to withdrawal from contact.

[My] wife doesn't really understand some of the things I do, the way that I act. Sometimes I'll turn into a hermit and I won't leave my room for days at a time and she just doesn't understand that. She doesn't understand me always not feeling safe and always having stuff around

me to keep me safe, you know? My parents and I have a real hard time communicating. They're always afraid to say things to me or talk to me, 'cause they're afraid I'm going to be upset. It's definitely, put a great distance between-between us in that.

As was the case with many of my respondents, Joel claimed that his wife and parents had trouble understanding him. This lack of understanding is a hallmark of the "ambiguous presence" when a family member is "there but not there" (Boss 2006) due to changes in their affective behavior. This absence causes psychological distress, as interactions between family members are never predictable, due to the possibly erratic response of the returned soldier.

#### **6.4.1 Childcare Responsibilities**

Although family life has gotten considerably more complicated as the normative power of the nuclear family has waned, military policies surrounding family life on deployment still implicitly rely on this model. The model soldier is still either a single man or a married one whose wife is expected to adopt full responsibility for childcare and housekeeping duties. This can place considerable stress on families, as many are forced to relocate to areas where they have more help (MacDermid Wadsworth 2010). Single parents are required to develop a "family action plan" before deployments.

However, if that family action plan falls apart, there can be problems for the soldier. For instance, in response to my question about the military's support for family life, one respondent gave an example of how this may work.

Carlos: I think it's like...family care plan, or something like that. But they say they promote the family and this and that, but you know if a, if a female does not have the-the proper arrangements for her child if she's a single mother, right? She's chaptered out the military. Now, why is that? Why you can't open up another MOS...[Military Operational Specialty] that's daycare now? Now, you can go in the military just specializing in kids' training, and doing daycare for the single mothers that's in the military.

Victor: She's chaptered out? Meaning, they get rid of her?

Carols: Got to go. Nobody's there to take care of your child. Or you got to relinquish rights to a family member. Your own *child*! Now we – this is – this goes back to, we're human.

Carlos was incensed by the idea that the conflict between service and family could cause a person to sign away custody. He saw this as emblematic of the military putting family as a secondary concern to the mission. His response is also meaningful, in that he claims that this is a problem *women soldiers have*, implicitly accepting the idea that a male soldier would have a partner to deal with these issues. Carlos himself had a partner who took on childcare responsibilities for his two children while he was deployed.

Several of the women in my sample, however, did indeed have issues surrounding childcare. Although most of the women were childless, those with children spoke of the problems surrounding emotional and physical separation because they had somewhat unreliable childcare. Melissa—a former Marine who is now in the Air Force reserve—had two teenaged children whom she decided should no longer live with their father, in part because of the possibility of deployment.

I was also married to two marines, so my second husband, he deployed a lot. And you know I became the single parent...When I was in Afghanistan he was deployed to Afghanistan, then I went over, so I had friends take care of my kids. How did that work out? It worked out fine but unfortunately my kids were exposed to some irritable moods more than they need to be, but in 2010 [we] just made a decision that they need to go live with their dad. Their dad couldn't take them in 2008 but in 2010 we just made the decision that they go live with their dad. They've been wanting to for a while and I was like, yeah, I deploy, it's probably the best thing.

The absences from family life that military service imposes made Melissa feel that she had to give up living with her children. During the interview, she was clearly upset about this, and discussed it in terms often used to describe absence in civilian life. She pointed to the contradictions between work and family life that all workers experience



to some degree. She also points out how the particular demands of military service caused friction with her daughter.

My daughter will say I've missed out on a lot of things like her birthdays, because of the Air Force—and she puts the blame on me, which is understandable because I am a physical presence, I am her mom. She thinks that I can just say no. I'm like, 'it doesn't work that way, I can't just say no.' So she keeps a Rolodex in her head of things I've missed, you know, birthdays I've missed because of drill weekends or deployments, missed holidays because of deployments, missed this, missed that, and it really sucks because it's my career, and I'm choosing my career over my kids in that sense but I don't know, being a mom and working being a dad and working too, it's, you know, all I know is if [I'm] out of the country when she graduates, I'll never be forgiven.

According to Melissa, her daughter refuses to acknowledge that Melissa has no choice when it comes time to deploy or train. Again, the total control the military can exert on soldiers creates a conflict between two “greedy” institutions (Segal 1986). Although many men and women report similar work/family conflicts in the civilian world, the demands the military makes on one's time, geographical location, and general person are substantially greater than those in nearly any civilian job.

A number of my respondents also spoke about barriers to communication while on deployment. Depending on where they were stationed and when they were

deployed over the course of these long wars, the ability to communicate with family variable. Early in the war, Internet wasn't available or was spotty, and for those in remote outposts in Afghanistan, it may still be. One respondent, Peter, didn't speak to his pregnant wife for seven months. During this time, she received a letter saying his unit had experienced some of the worst combat in the war. However, this letter had no indication of his status, causing her considerable distress. Further, operational security dictated that if there was an attack or soldier was injured, communications were shut down. This caused many to worry, as communications were cut mid-stream, with partners possibly not hearing about their loved one's status for days.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter shows how military policies surrounding family conflict with the demands of military life. Multiple deployments, communication troubles, and the changes wrought by combat can fray bonds and lead to marriage dissolution. As with policies surrounding race and mental health, many soldiers see the stated commitment to family as a means of placating outside interest groups, with very little impact on their personal lives.

In the next chapter, I review the limitations of this study, offer next steps, and suggestions on how the military could “recouple” to focus on its stated goals of equality.

## **7. Conclusion and Policy Implications**

### ***7.1 Summary***

The unifying thread of this dissertation is that military policies promoting equality and family are often at odds with the requirements of a war-ready force. This dynamic can damage soldiers and their families. For instance, policies promoting mental health reporting are undermined by requirements of “force readiness” that encourage both commanders and soldiers to hide or downplay mental health problems. Similarly, policies promoting equality are undermined by the casual racism and misogyny present in soldiers’ talk. I argue that individuals’ needs are nearly always subordinate to the mission, and that this can cause substantial and lasting problems for veterans and their families. I hope that this dissertation will serve as a corrective to scholarship that is overly enthusiastic about what the military can offer. Although research clearly shows that military service may, especially in peacetime, be a pathway into the middle class (MacLean 2007), this work rarely asks at what cost. While some veterans may enjoy higher incomes as a result of military service, this dissertation shows that there can be substantial personal and familial costs that are not accounted for in their paychecks.

Further, work showing the benefits of military service suffers from a limitation this dissertation shares: *we only talk to the survivors*. Scholarship has yet to tackle the possible effects of losing a loved one from combat. Ethnography focused on those bereaved though combat would be a powerful addition to our knowledge of the true costs of war.

In Chapter Three I build on organizational theory to argue that formal mental health policy is “decoupled” (Meyer and Rowan 1977) from actual military practice. This decoupling is part of a process I call punitive empathy, where apparently empathetic programs paradoxically end up punishing those for whom the programs were initially established. I draw on numerous cases from my data to show that veterans fear repercussions for reporting discriminatory situations and health complaints that were *likely caused by military service*. Further, I show that fearing these repercussions is a rational response to the design of the military, as coming forward can influence subsequent job opportunities. Given this, these programs largely serve a public relations function, as they are attempts at placating external constituencies concerned about soldiers’ mental health. This need to pacify external groups is a well-reported finding in

the literature on discrimination in organizations (Dobbin 2009); however, insights from this branch of sociological research are rarely applied to the military.

In Chapter Four, I argue that similar to the programs surrounding mental health, race and gender equity are secondary military concerns. I claim that the occupational structure of the military—with highly legitimized stratification based upon rank and extreme job segregation—naturalizes overt expressions of racial and gender animus. Contrary to theories of the post-Civil Rights era that claim open racism has been stigmatized (Bonilla-Silva 2010), I show that in the military, this language is common and unchallenged. Similarly, there is a casual misogyny in much of the language men use, denigrating women's position in the military and creating a generalized hostile environment. Finally, because grievance procedures remain within the military justice system, and there are clear reprisals for those who complain about racial and gendered harassment, claims are suppressed. Similar to the programs surrounding mental health, the military promotes diversity as a force multiplier and as central to their mission, but in practice, this diversity may amount to little more than symbolic inclusion (Collins 2011).

In Chapter Five I expand upon the theme of official policy colliding with practice by showing how family-promoting policies are undermined by the prerogatives of the wartime military. I argue that the stresses of deployment, especially in the context of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, have created a situation in which families are under extreme stress. Separation from family, the reshuffling of financial responsibilities and child-care, and the possible mental health problems returning veterans face may fray the bonds of family life. Both the trauma of deployments and the ambiguity surrounding return may contribute to the record number of divorces in this generation of veterans. Further, multiple deployments are also major stressors for partners and children, as they adapt to new roles and responsibilities in the absence of a family member. Finally, the mental health issues that may afflict veterans reverberate across the whole family, as adjustments surrounding mental health may influence relations for many years. Ultimately, many of these problems are gendered as belonging to women, given that most often the woman is left at home to deal with these exigencies. Further, when the gendered roles are reversed and the male partner remains at home, marital dissolution is more likely.

### **7.1.1 Limitations and Future Directions**

This dissertation is limited in several ways. First, I cannot generalize to the entire population from a snowball sample. Indeed, recent critiques of qualitative research go so far as to argue that qualitative work can only create an “existence proof” (Lucas 2012), by showing that a phenomenon exists. Lucas (2012) sees this as a problem, and subsequently appears to place qualitative research lower on his hierarchy of knowledge production, with conveniently, the type of research he conducts at the top. Lucas’ critique rests on the notion that non-representative samples cannot provide a reliable estimate of the concepts under examination. Problematically, however, this argument ignores the well-established distinction between theory building and statistical generalizability (Burawoy 2002). The arguments I make in this dissertation aim to add to theories about the organizational reproduction of inequality (Tomaskovic-Devey 2009) by showing how particular aspects of military culture, such as the internal policing system, allow the institution to quash reports of discrimination. Further, although this research cannot be generalized to a statistical population, when taken together with the rather stunning numbers on sexual assault, divorce, and racial discrimination, it



provides a compelling picture of the experiences of this generation of veterans. As is typical of qualitative research, subtle survey research based upon my claims could be added to future studies. However, if these surveys were disseminated through military channels, it would be important to ensure anonymity to avoid the types of repercussions I outlined above (Warner 2011). Indeed, one of my respondents told me that while he was in the military, he asked if his direct command was going to see the answers he gave on survey questions, and changed his replies accordingly.

A second limitation of this study is the cross-sectional nature of the interviews. Although this limits what we can say about how the issues identified play out over the life course, the research we have on discrimination and the effects of trauma and family dissolution give us some idea of what these veterans can expect in the future (Tanielian 2008), as a large body of work shows that combat veterans may suffer from “invisible wounds” for years. Further, many of the veterans I talked with claim that problems surrounding mental health and family life are directly related to enlistment and deployment. Although memory recall may be self-serving or perhaps false (Jerolimac and Kanh 2014), the sheer number of veterans who reported fear or actual repercussions

for coming forward gives me confidence in my assertion that this is a real social problem in the military that differentially affects stigmatized groups. Although my dissertation illuminates many of the issues surrounding veteran reintegration, I recognize that longitudinal data would strengthen my work by providing a more complex picture of how race and gender shape the post-service lives of veterans and their families. As with Vietnam veterans, the current generation of those returning from war will be faced with unanticipated consequences that need longitudinal research designs to capture. This type of work is particularly important, as we do not know whether the educational and behavioral deficits that research has identified regarding this cohort of children will be ameliorated once the deployments end. Further, more research is needed on how race and gender complicate family relations for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in the long term. Once veterans leave the military, their trajectories are complicated by a host of organizations, including the VA, schools, and the workplace, which may ease or complicate civilian life.

A third limitation of this work is that, although I discuss matters surrounding family members, I did not sample enough family members to include their perspectives.

Although I did ten interviews with family members, I did not include those here. Many veterans were reluctant to introduce me to their family, and many in my sample were no longer romantically involved. (In fact, in response to the question, “how did deployment affect your romantic life?” a female respondent said, “what romantic life?”) However, preliminary analysis of that data shows that in many cases, the veterans I interviewed may have *downplayed* some of their experiences with family members, perhaps in an attempt to shield their family from disturbing information (Fields 2009). Several of them told me that I was the first person they had spoken to about their time in combat.

### **Policy Implications**

There are a number of policy implications that can be drawn from this work. One major takeaway is that the military justice system should be subject to external review. Although the military signals formal compliance to its policies surrounding racial and gender discrimination to placate external constituencies, the recent spate of high-profile officers being charged with sexual harassment and assault (see Chapter 5) indicates that the problems I have outlined are endemic, pervasive, and upheld at the highest levels of the military. The irony of some of these is deep. Several officers *charged with rooting out*

*sexual assault in the military* have been accused of assaulting women. For instance, Lt. Col Kruinski overseeing the Air Force response to sexual assault was arrested for randomly groping a woman in a parking lot (Peralta 2013). Recently, a group of activists with the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) has been organizing to alter military policy surrounding sexual assault. This group of former soldiers supported Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's attempt to pass a bill that would remove the prosecution of these crimes from the chain of command. Senator Gillibrand's bill did much to restore a semblance of good faith in the system by replacing the discretion of commanders with independent military prosecutors not subject to the pressures of placating their commander while pursuing justice. These prosecutors were to be outside the unit in question, giving them relative freedom to pursue these cases. Further, withdrawing direct commanders' supervision of criminal proceedings would perhaps lessen retaliation against women who come forward. Unsurprisingly, given what I have written here, much of the top military brass vigorously opposed this bill, arguing that removing the discretion of commanders would undermine the necessary discipline effective leaders need. Although this legislation was defeated in a recent Senate vote (Long 2014), it would have

been a step towards reducing the epidemic of military sexual assault by adding real consequences for perpetrators, as opposed to the current system, which largely harms victims.

In place of Senator Gillibrand's comprehensive reforms, Senator Clair McCaskill offered a more tepid set of changes. Her bill, which passed the Senate and is awaiting approval in the house, keeps charges of assault within the chain of command. Unit commanders decide which cases will proceed; if they refuse to move a case forward, it is reviewed by a higher-ranking officer, and subsequently civilian officials (Vingiano and Munoz 2014). As I have argued, this will artificially deflate the number of cases brought forward, as victims know that their direct commander will be the arbiter in their case. More positively, this bill outlaws the so-called "good soldier" defense that allowed prosecutors to use the soldiers' history, importance to the unit, prior character reputation and "importance" as mitigating factors in their defense (Hillman 1999). Leaving aside the sheer callousness that would allow a rapist who attacked a fellow soldier to be considered "good" in the first place, this legislation is a small step forward.

However, as long as the military literally serves as judge, jury and executioner in cases like these, problems of retaliation and internal suppression will remain.

Although there is, to my knowledge, no movement similar to SWAN addressing racial justice in the military, questions of racial discrimination should also be removed from the military justice system. My respondents indicated a pervasive and accepted set of racial relations that are far from the colorblind norms present in general society. Blacks in the military are taught that resistance is futile and will bring greater problems. We know that this type of joking racism has lasting psychological effects and physical effects (Clark et al. 1999), and that the current internal mechanism the military has for dealing with this are inadequate, at best. Most Equal Opportunity (EO) representatives are enlisted rank, placing them in a relatively weak position as advocates. Further, unit commanders may tacitly countenance much harassment, as they set the tone of within-unit communication.

Finally, the policy challenges surrounding family are more complex. The stress causing separations, reshuffling of responsibilities, fear for the safety of the deployed loved one, and mental health challenges upon return are features of the military, which

are not easily amenable to policy changes. As Segal (1986) predicted, the military and family's increasing demands on individuals are in greater conflict than ever before.

Further, there is little research on the effects of deployment on those left at home. This is clearly an avenue for future work, as the possible long-term effects of having an absent family member may be profound. The little we know about the mental health of children and partners, academic and social success, and the long-term effects of bereavement is discouraging (Huebner 2007; Lester 2011; Lincoln 2008; Lamberg 2008), and makes this an important area to deepen our knowledge and perhaps provide policy interventions.

As a first step, the military could recognize that there is an inherent contradiction in demands between the organization and family life and develop (or follow through upon) policies that at least mitigate this contradiction. For instance, as a respondent suggested, one such policy would be opening up a childcare M.O.S. that allowed single parents to stay behind on deployments, rather than temporarily signing away their parental rights. However, a policy like this does not avoid the problem that status and rank are gained through deployments, and remaining home could possibly lead to other forms of stigmatization.

Another possibility to protect families from the exigencies of military life is to provide viable alternatives to military service. Richard J. Whalen, a former Nixon campaign staffer, explained recently that he helped to engineer the so-called “all-volunteer” force (AVF) in order to contain and control the political backlash against the draft following the Vietnam War (2006). Cynically, the architects of the all-volunteer army combined “political expediency and libertarian idealism” and determined the minimum salary necessary to buy off the lower classes and “create a de facto all-volunteer army” (2006). Despite the fact that soldiers on average have higher levels of education and income than comparable civilians, the strategy of drawing on the poor and lower middle classes to stock the military is still official policy. Of the fifty veterans I interviewed, only two claimed that they joined the military for patriotic reasons. Every other respondent cited financial or educational benefits as their reason for joining. Further, military pay for lower-ranking soldiers is clearly not enough to cover the costs of family, as, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2011), record numbers of military families and veterans are on food stamps.



Alan Aja and colleagues (2013) have argued for a federal job guarantee as a structural intervention to counteract the economic effects of the great recession. This race neutral, permanent program would provide a living wage and benefits, and eliminate unemployment due to irregularities in the labor market. Further, this program would be a massive investment in human and social capital, training many who currently lack “marketable” skills for jobs repairing infrastructure, or dealing with state and municipal needs. Although the authors of this proposal did not intend for it to replace military service as a mobility path, a national job program could also accomplish this. In many geographic localities in the U.S. the military has become the employer of last resort (Carr 2009). As such, many who feel they have no other options turn to the military. Importantly, this is not because these soldiers are necessarily more patriotic than the general public or more interested in fighting (although this desire may be instilled in them through service), as service members routinely cite humanitarian missions as the most important and fulfilling aspect of their service. Graeber (2007) claims that one of the primary reasons people join the military, and what they find most rewarding while serving, is providing *public services*, like fixing “schoolrooms” or “perform[ing] free

dental checkups" (2007), not destroying villages, raiding houses, or bombing targets.

Working class people, according to Graeber, join the military not primarily in order to spread democracy or fight terrorism (although some may believe in these causes), but rather to actually help people in ways that more privileged middle-class-college students take for granted and may have the opportunity to do through a college trip or fellowship. Providing a way for veterans to fulfill these goals at home through a national jobs program that provided such opportunities would be an excellent way to address some of the issues I outlined in this dissertation, by providing opportunities for potential soldiers outside the organization that contributes to veterans' problems. Several of the soldiers I interviewed reenlisted when they would otherwise not have, because they feared that they would be unable to find civilian employment. A national jobs program would also provide these veterans a viable exit.

### **Conclusion: Towards an Adequate Sociology of the Military.**

Many scholars and much of the public see the current size and function of our military as inevitable and even necessary, and public polling data consistently shows that the military is one of the most respected organizations in U.S. society (Allen et al.

2007). However, as with many new social arrangements, it has not always been so.

Indeed, President George Washington himself (1776) warned against the growth of the military as perhaps the biggest threat to liberty, arguing that it would undermine the foundation of the republic. There was no standing army established until WWII, and following its establishment, President Eisenhower echoed Washington with his warnings about the inevitable rise of the “Military Industrial Complex” that would erode the value of our democracy.

We have not heeded these warnings. Military spending is at an all time high, and The Nobel Prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and his colleague Linda J. Bilmes (2008) have claimed that the total cost to U.S. society from these wars will reach more than three trillion dollars, depleting the U.S. treasury and ensuring a long term-budget deficit that will hugely impact domestic spending for social services. Further, as I have shown in this dissertation, there is an immense social and psychological cost to those who serve and their families.

Although I offer some policy proposals above, I fear that effective reform is impossible in an organization whose purpose is the production of violence and

obedience {Macleish:2011tw}. In order to produce soldiers, the military has spent millions on research and training to overcome an aversion to killing (Grossman 1995). Basic training is designed to depersonalize and instill an almost instinctual response to orders. The military relies on the internalization of these behaviors. The informal culture of hazing reinforces the formal controls, and those who can't "hack" it are subject to attack. Many in the military see these mechanisms as necessary, and indeed, the parallel legal system is justified on precisely these grounds.

Further, organizational theorists have consistently shown that the reforms hierarchal organizations generally make to accommodate stigmatized groups do not fundamentally alter the relations of power that would lead to real changes for the stigmatized (Tilly 1998; Acker 2006; Acker 1990; Dobbin 2009). Further, the facile and gendered question pundits often ask (i.e., "Should women be in combat?") ignores the fact that *nobody should be in combat—it isn't healthy*. The assumption behind this question is that men belong in combat. Importantly, the military produces the very problems that the subsequent programs aimed at addressing these problems are supposed to fix; hence my agnosticism on the ability of reforms to adequately address these issues. Current

sociological theory is up to the task of analyzing militarism as a holistic facet of a racialized and gendered system affecting many areas of social life (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Acker 1990). Unfortunately, current sociological practice clings to an analysis of militarism that atomizes its effects, allowing the illusion of progress to be hidden in the broader context of exploitation.

Rather than accept the status quo surrounding the military, an adequate sociology of militarism should eschew the assumption that service leads to advancement that cannot be gained elsewhere, as this path is both exhausted and tied to the exploitation of people of color and women. Rather, a sociology of militarism should focus broadly on how the military, as a structure whose existence depends on the pernicious divisions of “us” and “them,” is centrally located in the production and exploitation of difference, no matter how equal its purported policies.

## **Appendix A: Questionnaire**

### **General Questions**

Can you give me a little background on yourself? Where are you from, where did you go to school?

Why did you decide to go into the military?

What led up to your decision?

What was your life like before you joined?

Can you tell me a little bit about your military service?

### **Labor Market Questions**

Were the education or job training programs offered by the military part of your decision to enlist?

Did you receive any job training while in the military?

Probe: (If yes, what kind of training and how did it help? Are you now using that training? Was this the type of training you hoped to get?)

Did you take classes or work toward a degree while in the military? Probe: Did you finish a degree?

What kind of work did you do before you joined the service? And once you joined, what did you do in the service pre-deployment?

What was your job while deployed?

Are you currently employed and if so where? What are your duties at this job?

Probe: (If employed) how did you find out about this job? (If unemployed) are you looking for work? How are you searching for work?

Has being a veteran helped you search for or find work?

(If yes) How did it help?

(If no), Has being a veteran caused any problems in searching for or finding work? (If yes) What problems did it cause?

Approximately how long did you look for work when you returned?

Did being a veteran affect your job search?

Has being a veteran affected your conversations or relationships with co-workers?

How do you think potential employers view your military service?

Aside from formal training, how has your military service affected your post-service employment?

Did you ever witness any discrimination while you were in the military?

Have you witnessed any discrimination in the civilian labor market?

The military has a long history of working towards racial equality and has recently pushed for greater sex equality. The military was one of the first institutions in the U.S. to formally desegregate. Do you feel that the military's efforts in this regard have been successful regarding race? Regarding sex?

How racially integrated was your unit while you were serving? How did this affect your work?

How integrated by sex was your unit? How did this affect your work?

Do you think that your experiences are similar to those of other veterans?

Do you feel your race or sex has affected your experience in the labor market? (Probe: do you have any examples of this?)

(If employed) Is your current job more or less integrated by race in comparison to when you were serving?

(If More or Less) How does this effect the work environment?

Is your current job more or less integrated by sex in comparison to when you were serving?

(If More or Less) How does this effect the work environment?

Do you feel your race ever affected how you were treated in the service?

Do you feel that your sex ever affected how you were treated in the service?

Should veterans receive special treatment in the labor market? (If yes) What kind of treatment? (If yes or no: Should any other group receive special treatment in the labor market?)

### **Health Questions**

Where were you stationed and how dangerous was the area?

Approximately how many times did you experience combat? What kind—where?

Have you been diagnosed with any service-connected physical conditions?

Probe: (If no) Are there any particular health issues you have faced since your return?

Since your return, have you used any Veteran Affairs Medical Centers or Local Veterans

Centers?

Probe: (If yes) Overall, how have you felt about this care? (If no) What health care services have you used instead? How have you felt about the quality of this care?

For either VA care or other care: Have there been any barriers to or problems with seeking medical care?

Have you been diagnosed with depression, PTSD, TBI, or any similar condition since returning from the service?

Probe: (If yes) How has this affected your ability to find work? How has this affected your relationships with your family? How has this affected your relationships with your friends?

Some illnesses are more likely to affect certain groups of people. As a white/black man/woman do you feel the medical service you have received since returning has met your specific needs?

Probe: (If yes) How has this service met your needs? (If no) Please be as explicit as possible in explaining why.

Some people who don't have a diagnosis of PTSD, TBI, or a similar condition still experience some symptoms related to service in a combat zone. Have you experienced any of the following since your return?:

Difficulty falling/staying asleep?

Irritability/Anger?

Difficulty paying attention for long periods of time?

Hypervigilance?

Exaggerated startle response?

Memory Loss?

Probe: If yes: how has this affected your ability to find work?

How has this affected your relationships with your family?

How has this affected your relationships with your friends?

Many

### **Family Reintegration Questions**

Did your deployment create changes in your family responsibilities, for example, care giving, childcare, or work?

(If yes) What kind of changes?



How has your family responded to your return home?

Do you have any children? How have they in responded? (If yes) Who looked after your children while you were deployed?

Did this person have primary responsibility for your children before you were deployed? Probe: Does this person still help with child-care duties?

(If married): How has your return affected your married life? (If unmarried): How has your return affected your romantic life?

What do you think has been most helpful in returning to civilian life? What do you think has been least helpful in returning to civilian life? How have you felt about family life since your return?

Many veterans report that they have trouble being understood when they return from service by former friends, loved ones, or family members. Have you experienced this?

Probe: (If yes) how have you dealt with this situation? (If no) what do you think contributes to the understanding you seem to be receiving?

The military places a high value on family. For instance, there are policies that promote marriage through providing benefits. Has your service in any way changed your family's expectations about your family responsibilities?

How did you handle family matters while you were deployed?

Did you miss any major family events during your deployment?

Is your family current making enough money to make ends meet?

Who has supported you since your return? Probe: (What form has this support taken?)

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent**

This research study examines reentry and reintegration for diverse groups of veterans. It looks specifically at the process of reintegration after deployment, including the things that make reintegration easier or harder. Your input will help researchers understand what factors are

involved in reintegration and what is working and what is not.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and there are no direct benefits to you from participating in this research. Participation in this study involves being interviewed. The interview questions will address your experiences in finding work and working, your post-deployment mental health, and your family relationships and daily activities since your return. You can refuse to answer any and all questions. If you find any questions make you uncomfortable, please let me know and we will move on. You can also end the interview at any point. The interview will last approximately an hour. All of your interview and survey responses will be totally confidential and only the researchers will have access to your responses. No facts that could possibly point to your identity will appear in any published work from this study. Research information that you provide will be assigned a code number, which will not be linked to your identity. Any document that would link your identity to a given code number will be destroyed immediately unless you give the researchers permission to contact you in the future. If you do allow us to contact you later, all documents that would link your identity to a given code number will be kept separately from the interview and survey data and be stored separately in a password protected computer file. I would like to record your interview, but if you don't want me to record it, I will take hand-written notes during our conversation. After the interview, you will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, you are free to decline to participate or

to stop participating at any time. You will receive \$25 compensation for your participation.

Although I will not collect any identifying information, you will need to provide your name, address, and SSN on a payment verification form for Duke University accounting purposes. This information will **not** be linked to the study. If you do not wish to provide this information, you cannot be paid, but you can still participate, or opt to donate your compensation to a non-profit organization. When the research is complete, I will be willing to share any and all published research findings and provide you with a copy of any published information.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions, please ask them now. If you have questions later or would like to provide additional information, please email me at [victor.ray@duke.edu](mailto:victor.ray@duke.edu) or call me at (919) 381-0800. You may also contact my faculty advisors; Dr. Linda Burton [lbarton@soc.duke.edu](mailto:lbarton@soc.duke.edu) (919) 660-5623 or Dr. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva at [ebs@soc.duke.edu](mailto:ebs@soc.duke.edu) (919) 660-5623. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee at 919-684-3030. I, \_\_\_\_\_, (please print name) agree to participate in the study. I understand that I may end my participation at any time.

I agree \_\_\_\_\_ /do not agree \_\_\_\_\_ to have my interview recorded

I agree \_\_\_\_\_ /do not agree \_\_\_\_\_ to be contacted in the future regarding this study. I understand that any identifying information about myself will be used only for study-specific purposes and will be destroyed within the next two years. I further understand that such

information will only be made available to the researchers and will be kept confidential in password-protected computer files.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

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